



St Bonaventure's RC School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 102787
LEA Newham LEA
Inspection number 276771
Inspection dates 28 February 2006 to 28 February 2006
Reporting inspector Roy Blatchford

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to inspect any school in England. The inspection is to be treated as a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Boleyn Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Forest Gate
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		London E7 9QD
Gender of pupils	Boys	Telephone number	02084723844
Number on roll	1264	Fax number	02084712749
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Msgr John Armitage
Date of previous inspection	27 November 2000	Headteacher	Mr Stephen Foster

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11 to 18	28 February 2006 - 28 February 2006	276771

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two inspectors. In the course of the day visit, inspectors met with a range of staff and students and observed the school at work. Paired observations of several lessons were conducted with the deputy heads. The school's excellent preparatory papers, including its clear, analytical self-evaluation document, provided critical evidence in shaping inspectors' judgements. Discussions with governors and the receipt of 170 questionnaires from parents further assisted the writing of this report.

Description of the school

St Bonaventure's School is an 11 - 18 boys' Catholic comprehensive serving the Newham Deanery in East London. Of its 1264 students, over 80% are from a diverse range of ethnic minority groups. Twenty-eight boys have statements of special educational needs; about a fifth are eligible for free school meals. The school has enjoyed Technology College status since 1994 and has also been granted Language College status from April 2006. The large sixth form is run jointly with St Angela's Ursuline School.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

One of the boys interviewed by inspectors reflected on his first three years at St Bonaventure's: 'Everyday I can be myself. I feel safe because I'm with my friends and with teachers I can rely on'. An echo of these powerful words came from a parent, writing on a questionnaire: 'Our son has a statement of special educational needs. He feels safe, secure and included in school life. All members of staff actively seek and really listen to our views, and our son is set realistic goals. This is a happy school with high standards'. As is recognised in the local community, St Bonaventure's is an outstanding school of which students, parents, staff, governors and the diocese are rightly proud. Since its last inspection six years ago, the school has sustained the rich quality of education on offer to the boys in this area of East London, providing very good value for money. The harmonious cultural diversity among the boys is a distinctive feature. Why is the school very successful? There are three applications for every one of the 180 places in Year 7, and thus the boys arrive with high ambition and expectations, strongly supported by their parents. From the boys' first days in the school, teaching and support staff, at all levels, establish equally high expectations of what students can achieve, irrespective of background, ability or aspiration. Systems for day-to-day organisation are meticulous. The boys' positive attitudes and very good behaviour mean that they arrive at each lesson wanting to learn. They are not disappointed. Teachers plan thoroughly for all levels of ability in their classes; the marking of work is regular and tells the boys how well they are doing and how they can improve. All around the school are vibrant displays celebrating the boys' successes in classrooms, in examinations and in their exciting array of extracurricular activities; some of the art work is stunning. The quality of care, guidance and support received by every individual boy is exemplary, contributed to by governors, teachers and the extensive team of support staff. The boys' personal development lies at the heart of much of the school's planning. Year 11 and sixth-form students interviewed showed themselves to be confident, reflective and caring young people poised to contribute to the cosmopolitan 21st century society in which they live. The Catholic ethos of firm discipline, care and comradeship permeates all aspects of school life. It underpins a climate of purpose and calm in which the boys can, every day, realise their unique talents. Clearly, the quality of leadership given by the headteacher and his senior staff has been decisive in sustaining a long tradition of high quality education at St Bonaventure's. Subject leaders are increasingly playing their part to ensure that accountability for the boys' achievements is shared by all teachers. The school knows well its strengths and areas for development; inspectors accord with the school's robust self-evaluation judgements. As is to be expected of a high performing staff and governing body, together they have identified certain practices in need of renewal and development. The leadership team shared eloquently with inspectors the timeliness of looking afresh at the kinds of work prepared for boys who have English as an additional language. Equally, they recognise the importance of reviewing styles of teaching and learning in all classrooms, including how most effectively to deploy learning support in its various guises. Further, improvements to the curriculum, for example to expand vocational education in Years 10 and 11, are under active discussion.

This is a school wishing to be at the cutting edge of national developments in education, tailored wisely to suits the needs of the boys it serves. A Year 9 boy when asked to talk about learning at St Bonaventure's pondered for a moment, then said, confident that others in the group would value and respect his remarks: 'Every day is a different experience - you wonder what's going to happen next. I don't like the summer holidays'.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The sixth form is vibrant. The boys enjoy working here and this is reflected in the high numbers who stay on to complete courses. They are ambitious for their futures and are focused on achieving well. Last year 94% went on to higher education. The management of the sixth form has ensured a very effective and improving learning experience for the students. Approximately half the students in the sixth form are girls as it is run jointly between St Bonaventure's and St Angela's Ursuline School. One boy commented, 'I enjoy working with girls in the sixth form - they often have a different point of view and this has changed some of my ideas'. A significant factor in the boys' success is, as one observed, 'Teachers are always prepared to help you, even in the holidays. They are very knowledgeable about their subject.' A diverse range of additional activities gives the boys a wider experience of life. In their words: 'I found working at the homeless shelter rewarding - at the end of the day I felt we had made a difference'; 'the gospel choir has given me the opportunity to travel to many countries'.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

The boys, who enter the school with levels of attainment similar to those found nationally, make tremendous progress and attain above average standards as they move up through the years. The school sets demanding academic targets, and the boys rise to the challenge. No groups underachieve. By the end of Year 9, standards are well above average in English, mathematics and science: in 2005, more than four out of five boys attained Level 5 or better in all the core subjects. The proportion of boys attaining at least five higher grades, A* - C, at GCSE was 71 per cent in 2005, above the national average and in line with sustained strong performance by students at the school in recent years. The percentage of higher grades including English and mathematics was 66%, similarly well above the national picture. One measure of how the school harnesses the talents of every individual is the statistic that 100% gained 5 or more A* - G grades in 2005. Standards in the sixth form have been broadly average, although in 2005 results saw a marked improvement. Results at A level in subjects that include English, mathematics and physics are above the national average, although results in vocational courses are still slightly behind. All indicators show that there is an upward trend in students' achievement.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The boys' attendance, consistently in excess of 95% in recent years, is well above national averages for secondary schools in England. On the inspection day, Year 7 attendance was over 99%, and that in Year 10 nearly 97%. These exceptional levels of attendance are rooted in the personal enjoyment evident among students, whether in lessons, at break or involved in extracurricular activities. Notably, all the boys thrive in an environment which values their cultural, linguistic and social differences. Lessons begin with a prayer: 'grant me a calm mind/a quiet disposition and an attentive ear'; this provides a focused starting point, valued by staff and students alike. The students' keen awareness of the importance of spiritual and moral development in their lives surfaced in comments from younger boys when discussing with an inspector Martin Luther King's words, 'Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere'. Further, one added disarmingly: 'I have a long bus journey across London and I meet a lot of adults. I always try to set an example to them'. The boys spoke enthusiastically of the extracurricular events in which they are engaged, from debating, choir and basketball to overseas trips and study support sessions. Many of these activities serve to raise boys' ambitions and aspirations.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

During paired observations of lessons between an inspector and two deputy heads, a range of strengths and areas for development were seen and agreed. One teacher in an English lesson used praise extremely successfully and modelled a good answer to all the boys which helped them learn effectively. In a politics lesson the teacher asked sixth-form students to write their one word opinion on styles of government, from a choice of four, on small white boards and asked them to discuss why. This proved a simple and useful strategy for enabling their opinions to be valued, to increase their understanding of the issues involved, and to get them to work in different groups. Other useful ideas which helped learning were observed: sometimes teachers explained the meaning of important words for the lesson and wrote them on the board for reference; other teachers wrote the lesson's aims and main points for boys to take away. Observers also saw where support staff could have been used more effectively, and where teachers talked at the pupils for rather long periods of time before asking them to be active. In all the lessons visited by inspectors, the boys were diligent and readily involved in their work. They take learning seriously: work is well presented and exercise books treated with care and value. Relationships in class between staff and boys are very positive, something identified by students of all ages as being a characteristic of the teaching at St Bonaventure's.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is well planned and suits the needs of most learners. Aware of certain shortcomings, a curriculum development group is researching how best to develop the Key Stage 4 curriculum and the potential for 'fast track' options. The boys drew inspectors' attention to the aspects of the curriculum which they most valued, many of which lie beyond the formal school day: revision classes, study skills sessions, literacy support, booster classes and peer mentoring. These were what the boys felt were having an impact on their work. In the eyes of a Year 10 student: 'Our teachers are committed - they give us their free time'. The school makes ingenious and imaginative use of every available space on its cramped campus; the boys wish they had playing fields on site, in preference to the small lawns upon which 'we are not allowed to step in the winter'.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school places great store by the key outcomes of the Every Child Matters national agenda: being safe, being healthy, achievement and enjoyment, contribution to the community, and economic well-being. The leadership team's analysis of both provision and outcomes is very well judged. All staff and students to whom inspectors spoke viewed these outcomes as having been at the heart of a St Bonaventure's education for many years. The growing importance of the school council and the regular presence of the school chaplain were mentioned several times by the boys as being important to them. The way in which the boys look out for one another and respect each other's spaces in very crowded playgrounds is a singular tribute to all involved in the running of St Bonaventure's. During the one day spent in the school, inspectors saw not a single incident of careless or impolite behaviour. Prefects contribute thoughtfully to the high quality of pastoral support. The pride with which the boys keep their student planners up-to-date, signed regularly by tutors and parents, is persuasive evidence that clearly understood guidance and support procedures underpin the boys' good progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Staff, boys and governors alike commented on the distinctive and effective leadership given by the headteacher. For the boys he is a regular and important presence around the school. For the staff and governors he has provided clarity of vision and an 'open door' approach which values everyone's contribution to the school's achievements. Professional development is taken seriously by the leadership team, and thus the recruitment and retention of teachers does not present the problem faced by some inner-urban schools. The boys are the beneficiaries of continuity with skilled and committed teachers. At middle management level, the school acknowledges that the best practice is not yet shared as effectively as it might be, although effective

development planning in departments is emerging strongly. Parents show their support for the school in excellent levels of attendance at meetings arranged for them. The school enters into many creative and imaginative partnerships with outside bodies, locally and nationally, to enrich the quality of the boys' education. St Bonaventure's is very well placed to sustain its mission statement: 'We endeavour to be a community where each individual can grow spiritually, academically and socially'.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Students

You may recall that on Shrove Tuesday we inspected the school. A fuller report is available for parents, but we thought the school council might like a summary for discussion. Thank you for sharing your views about life at St Bon's, and we have included a few of your comments in the published report. A special note of thanks goes to your Year 11 Head and Deputy Head boys who welcomed us to the school, bright and early, and gave us a first-class introductory talk.

You all know that the school is very successful. Why is that so? Firstly, you yourselves come to the school in Year 7 with very positive attitudes, wanting to learn. As you move up through the school you are well taught in an atmosphere of firm discipline and purpose. You respect each other's opinions in class, and when moving around your cramped site you invariably treat each other with dignity and care. You value the Catholic principles upon which the school is based. You also value how all the staff give their time generously to support your studies, and you clearly enjoy the wide range of visits, visitors and extracurricular activities. The presence of a thriving sixth form serves as a powerful motivation for you to do well and aspire to continue your studies into higher education.

The governors and headteacher know in depth the school's strengths and what they need to do to sustain current successes. They are currently working to improve opportunities in class for those of you who have English as an additional language, and to see how more vocational opportunities can be offered in Years 10 and 11. They would also value your views - many of which you shared with us - on how styles of learning in lessons can be made even more motivating. You are rightly proud of St Bon's. We wish everyone associated with the school continued success, and enjoyment in your learning.

Yours sincerely

Roy Blatchford andamp; Penny Holden

HMI andamp; Additional Inspector