



St Bernard's Convent School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 110084
LEA Slough LEA
Inspection number 278366
Inspection dates 23 November 2005 to 24 November 2005
Reporting inspector Emma Ing HMI

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

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|------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Type of school | Grammar (selective) | School address | 1 Langley Road |
| School category | Voluntary aided | | Slough |
| Age range of pupils | 11 to 18 | | SL3 7AF |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed | Telephone number | 01753 527020 |
| Number on roll | 871 | Fax number | 01753 576919 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body | Chair of governors | Mr Howard McBrien |
| Date of previous inspection | 29 January 2001 | Headteacher | Mr John McAteer |

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

St Bernard's School is a co-educational, voluntary aided, selective Catholic school, situated in Slough, Berkshire. The school is in the trusteeship of the Bernardine Order and students are educated in buildings which form both the school and the home of the monastic community. The school was granted specialist status in humanities in 2004. Students' attainment on entry is well above average, but is lower than many selective schools. This is as a result of the denominational nature of the school coupled with the fact that Slough has sufficient places for 45% of secondary aged students to attend a grammar school. The students are predominantly from white British background but a significant proportion of students come from other, mainly white, ethnic backgrounds. The school does not represent the ethnic mix of the local population.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St. Bernard's is a good school with outstanding features. It offers a good well-rounded education with a strong emphasis on spiritual, moral, cultural and social development. It gives good value for money. Students' examination and test grades are generally very good and the marked improvement in standards in 2005, together with lesson observations made over the course of the inspection, indicate that students are making good progress. Students learn to be questioning, responsible and caring citizens. They have a good understanding of right and wrong and a powerful sense of justice, recognising the role of the individual in ensuring equality and fairness. The school provides a wide range of religious, cultural and sporting opportunities beyond the curriculum. Students are well cared for, and feel safe and happy at their school. Teaching in the school is good and the current focus on assessment for learning is making it even better. Data about pupil progress is readily available to support teaching and track learning and some departments are using this very effectively. Leadership and management are good. A clear vision is widely shared and the school runs smoothly. Governors give a good strategic lead to the school and are able both to support and challenge the leadership team. Although leaders know the strengths and weaknesses of the school they are not yet using this knowledge analytically to make robust and focussed plans for improvement which can be widely shared. Nevertheless, there is good capacity for further improvement in the school.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The school judges the sixth form to be effective; data, lesson observations and discussions with staff and students support this view. It offers a good range of courses, and works in partnership with local schools to supplement overall provision. The school takes great care to ensure students choose appropriate options. Standards are well above the national average and the percentage of top grades has risen by nearly 50% in the last three years. However, although students' overall rate of achievement has risen steadily, standards and progress are variable in individual subjects from year to year. Good teaching helps students make good progress in all lessons and reach high standards. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and plan lessons which offer interest and challenge. Well-focused questioning helps students to think critically. Most sixth form students diligently support younger students with reading practice, and take part in projects outside school to help refugees and the homeless. Many take part in the wide range of excellent sports, music and drama activities outside lessons, and provide very good role models for younger peers. Leadership and management are good, ensuring resources are utilised very well to meet learners' needs and provide good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

* Develop the processes of school self evaluation, including lesson observation and the consistent use of data, to facilitate a clear overview of areas of strength and

weakness* Make more rigorous use of the wealth of data available to ensure that planning for whole school, departmental and individual student improvement is co-ordinated, robust and focussed.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Academic attainment is very high at St Bernard's School. Nearly all students achieve five or more General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) grades with good passes and the proportion of students that attain good passes in eight GCSEs is very high. Students also do very well in the national tests for 14 year olds. All students reach the expected level for their age and many attain standards significantly higher than this in all three core subjects. Data from 2005 indicates that attainment in mathematics is outstanding, but it is also exceptionally good in both English and science. In some respects these high standards reflect the selective nature of the school and the fact that students arrive with good levels of competence in the core subjects. However, the school sets sufficiently challenging targets which students meet. Recent improvements in test results and lesson observations indicate that students make good progress. Students' progress in English between entering the school in Year 7 and finishing their GCSE year is less good than that in maths and science. Those students who have learning difficulties and disabilities make particularly good progress throughout their time at this school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students' personal development is a major strength of the school. Students have very good attitudes to school. They behave very well and attendance is very good. Students enjoy both their lessons and the wide range of extra-curricular opportunities. They speak enthusiastically of the way they are involved in the many activities the school offers. Students' spiritual, moral, personal and social development is also exceptionally strong because they have many opportunities to think about, discuss and act on fundamental issues. They respond very well to the school's strong Christian values and work in large numbers for the good of others in and outside the school community. They have a highly developed sense of what is right and wrong and many hold their views with considerable passion. A project involving older students in which they made exchange visits with young people in South Africa, and studied the effects of HIV, has given them great insight into the effects of social stigma and poverty. Whilst in Africa they made a video for distribution in local schools about these issues. Students feel valued by staff and they value their teachers and each other. Relationships are very good. Students see the school as a very harmonious community in which respect for other people is a strong feature. There is a strong awareness of the value of other cultures and traditions. Students are aware of the essentials of a healthy and safe life and feel secure in school. They have a voice in the school. The elected school council is taken seriously and students feel it makes a difference. The high academic standards

attained, together with other opportunities to develop workplace skills, prepare students to make a good contribution to working life in the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The school judges its teaching and learning to be good. Inspectors confirm this view. Most teaching is good, while some is outstanding. No unsatisfactory lessons were observed. Lessons are planned well with clear objectives for learning. They offer a wide range of activities, have a brisk pace, and are planned to meet the needs of all students. Interactive whiteboards are used well to support learning. Supported by their good relationships with teachers, students respond positively, making good progress and showing obvious enjoyment. Teachers use questioning well to offer appropriate challenge and check progress. However, sometimes more could be done to ensure that all students have the opportunity to respond to questions, for instance, by asking everyone to share their ideas with a peer initially. Many teachers make effective use of diagnostic marking to help students understand their own progress and how to improve, but this is not fully consistent across the school. Where it is done well students clearly understand what they are doing well and what they need to do to improve. Self assessment and peer assessment are also used effectively to help students develop an awareness of their progress in some subjects.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum in all years is broad and balanced. It challenges students to achieve their best in school subjects and the many activities outside lessons enable students to develop outstanding personal qualities. Becoming a humanities specialist school has enhanced the school's partnership with local people who join school activities and show students how to extend their creative abilities. All students in Years 10 and 11 take a full range of GCSEs, including design and technology and at least one language from a choice of five. The school is aware that it still needs to develop students' information and communication technology (ICT) skills in all curriculum subjects, particularly at GCSE level. Personal, social and health education, delivered across nearly all subjects, is outstanding. Careers guidance is very good, and all students go on a work placement in Year 11. They are very well prepared for sixth form study. The curriculum is enriched by excellent activities outside lessons, ranging from visits to theatres, museums and field centres, mock trials with local magistrates, school choir, bands and instrumental lessons. A high proportion of students participate regularly in these, and in the many well-organised sports activities. A growing number help in projects such as helping local refugees, and foreign exchanges.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Students and parents recognise that the school is highly committed to the care and support of students. This is a key aim of the school and outstandingly well achieved. The caring atmosphere that is a hallmark of the school ensures that students feel valued, happy, safe and secure. Students know that there will be a rapid and usually effective response if bullying occurs. Students feel well supported and confident of the help staff will give when they need it. The school works very well in partnership with parents and keeps them well informed of what is going on and of their children's progress. Parents are strongly supportive of the work of the school. Teachers are knowledgeable about students who experience difficulties in their learning and are active in ensuring that they are well supported. Good arrangements are made for the protection of vulnerable children and child protection procedures are secure. Tracking and monitoring of students' progress is regularly checked and effective action taken if they are falling behind. All students have appropriate targets, but the sixth form staff are leading the way in encouraging students to set their sights on higher targets. Students receive very good advice as they move from one stage of their education to another.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school aims are very clear and underpin the work of all within it. All individuals within the school are valued and whilst academic achievement is clearly a strong focus of the school, this is not at the expense of the personal, moral, social and spiritual development of students. The outstanding behaviour of students, their high levels of sensitivity and moral responsibility are an outcome of the good leadership of governors and staff at all levels. School leaders have ensured breadth of both curricular and extra curricular activities which enable students to develop both confidence and a wide range of skills and competencies. The leadership of the school is careful to consult both parents and students and to seek their opinions concerning areas for improvement. Very significant improvements have been made as a result, for example, in the development of Physical Education GCSE and Advanced Level courses. Both the data manager and heads of department use school level and pupil level data to evaluate the quality of their provision. In design and technology careful tracking of pupil progress has ensured that all are supported to achieve well. In maths, analysis of data has led to adjustments both in setting arrangements and in teaching and learning which have had a positive impact on the standards achieved. Such good practice, however, is not consistent across all departments. The school gathers a good deal of information in order to enable managers to clarify their view of its strengths and weaknesses which inspectors can confirm are accurate. However, managers do not pay enough attention to the regular and rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning. Whilst the school knows itself well, it is not making enough use of the wealth of data available to make robust and focussed plans for improvement. The governing body has a good understanding of the issues which the school faces and engages in careful

strategic planning to ensure that the quality of provision remains high. Governors, especially the chair and vice chair, while highly supportive, are able to enter into informed and challenging dialogue with the school leadership. As a result of the strong leadership of the head teacher and senior leaders, the school is well placed to continue improving.

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Inspection judgements

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

Overall effectiveness

| | | |
|--|-----|-----|
| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 2 | 2 |
| 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 | 3 | 3 |
| 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? | 2 | 2 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 1 | 2 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 2 | 2 |
| How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress | 2 | |

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 | 2 | |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 2 | |
| 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 | 2 | |

The quality of provision

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs? | 2 | 2 |
| How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners? | 1 | 1 |
| 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? | 2 | 2 |
| 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 | 3 | |
| 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 | 2 | |
| 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

Thank you for the warm welcome you extended to me and the inspection team when we visited your school to carry out our inspection. We all found it a pleasure to meet and talk with you and observe your learning in lessons and around the school.

We were very impressed by your behaviour, your attitudes, your values, and by your relationships. Your academic standards are high and you make good progress overall. You are justifiably proud of your school. The headteacher together with his senior team and the governing body lead the school well. They ensure that the aims and values of the school underpin all that happens within it and that you are getting a good all round education. We have, however, asked them to make sharper use of the data they collect about the school to enable them to plan more effectively to make your school even better. We felt that the wide range of opportunities that are offered to you by your school are outstanding. Many of you are involved in music, drama and sport outside of lessons and even more of you are contributing both to the school and to the wider community in important ways. If you are one of the few who are not making the most of these opportunities we would urge you to think about how you could join in and benefit from them too. The school seeks your views and those of your parents well and responds appropriately. Your school council is providing you with a clear voice and is effecting change on your behalf. You are taught well. Your lessons are interesting and well suited to your learning needs.

When we talked to you, many of you expressed your gratitude to your teachers who, as one of you told us, really put themselves out and seek the best for you. I think that we all felt that we would enjoy attending Guardian Angels' Day and hearing your tribute to them.

With best wishes

Emma Ing, Her Majesty's Inspector