



Balshaw's Church of England High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 119775
LEA Lancashire
Inspection number 280655
Inspection dates 14 June 2006 to 15 June 2006
Reporting inspector Mr Peter Toft HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Church Road
School category	Voluntary controlled		Leyland
Age range of pupils	11 to 16		Lancashire, PR25 3AH
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01772 421009
Number on roll	915	Fax number	01772 458 213
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr T Callaghan
Date of previous inspection	1 November 2000	Headteacher	Miss J Venn

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11 to 16	14 June 2006 - 15 June 2006	280655

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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

Balshaw's Church of England High School is a voluntary controlled comprehensive school, with specialist engineering status, for boys and girls aged 11 to 16. It has 915 pupils, 96% of whom are White British and all but three speak English as their first language. The school serves the town of Leyland and the surrounding district. Pupils enter the school with average prior attainment. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is slightly below average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Balshaw's is a very good school with some outstanding features, namely the inspiring leadership provided by the headteacher, the palpable Christian ethos, the care, guidance and support given to the pupils and their personal development. The school is popular and oversubscribed. Parents are overwhelmingly positive in their views of the education which their children receive and of the civilised behaviour which the school expects both in lessons and as pupils move about the school. Pupils thrive in their time here.

Standards are high and achievement is good. Although the percentage of pupils gaining five or more higher grades in the GCSE examinations fell in 2005, it remained well above the national average. Characteristically, staff are working hard to reverse this decline. Pupils are generally well taught; during the inspection, the teaching was good or outstanding in more than two thirds of the lessons seen. Most pupils enjoy their lessons and work hard in them but a small minority need, and receive, very firm behaviour management to ensure that they concentrate properly. All pupils benefit from the willingness of staff to 'go the extra mile' in helping them through specific problems in their learning although, in a few lessons, not all pupils are sufficiently challenged. Pupils' work is generally well marked but in a minority of lessons some pupils are unclear about how to improve their work. Management is good throughout the school but would benefit from a more cohesive policy of target setting. The curriculum is broad and balanced and gives pupils a very good foundation for life after school, although information and communication technology (ICT) is not used to the full in all subjects to make learning more interesting. The range of extra-curricular activities provided is outstanding.

The recommendations made in the last inspection report have been carried out effectively. The school continues to improve and it has a very good capacity to carry on doing so.

Finances are carefully managed and, considering the high performance of the school and its average running costs, it gives good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make the target setting process overall more cohesive.
- Ensure that all lessons include stimulating activities that challenge all pupils.
- Improve access to ICT in subjects where it is not well provided so that it can be used more widely to stimulate learning.
- Spread the good practice in marking to ensure that all subjects provide clear guidance to pupils on how well they are doing and what to do to improve.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good among pupils from all backgrounds as it is for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Boys and girls make good progress through Key Stage

3 and Key Stage 4. Having arrived in Year 7 with average levels of prior attainment, both boys and girls attain standards well above national expectations in Year 11.

At Key Stage 3, pupils make very good progress in science and mathematics, achieving standards significantly higher than those expected for their age. In English, standards continue to be significantly higher than the national average but have declined in recent years. Carefully considered strategies, including teachers offering students more constructive comments on marked work, have been introduced to correct this decline.

At Key Stage 4, the school has, for several years, steadily increased the proportion of pupils attaining at least five A* to C grades in GCSE examinations. In 2005, there was a decline, which the school had predicted, although standards remain above the national average. This decline was due, for example, to staffing difficulties which have subsequently been resolved, and to weaknesses in teaching which are being resolved.

Pupils achieve significantly better than national averages in several GCSE subjects including mathematics, science, design and technology, drama, geography, history and ICT. In modern foreign languages, performance has been significantly below the national average and the school has set in motion appropriate strategies, including greater use of specialist assistants, to improve teaching and standards.

Most subject departments make good use of data from a variety of sources, including a careful analysis of examination results, to inform planning, teaching and learning. However, the approach to target setting for the whole school is not systematic enough to draw together the good planning which takes place in various sections of the school. This makes it difficult for some staff to see the overall picture of how well the school is doing.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being are excellent, and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development overall is outstanding.

The very strong Christian ethos of the school and the high levels of mutual respect staff and pupils have for each other create an atmosphere where pupils feel safe and able to learn and to express themselves. Pupils are very serious about school and want to learn in lessons. They enjoy the extensive extra curricular activities on offer which range from juggling to residential trips in France. They feel their views are well heard through the school's lower and middle councils and its prefect review group. One of the successes of pupils in influencing the running of the school through these groups is the addition of the healthy option menu for lunch. Pupils and staff are sensitive to each other and communicate very well. Attendance rates are consistently high. Pupils are generally very well behaved in lessons and in corridors, and they are considerate and polite towards one another. They are very well prepared for their work placements and gain useful skills and knowledge from the experience. The time for this is very usefully extended for identified pupils in order to match their specific needs.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall. There are examples of exemplary teaching characterised by teachers' infectious enthusiasm and very high expectations of pupils. In such cases, the stimulating and absorbing activities, and the frequent bouts of humour encourage all pupils to do their best and they thoroughly enjoy their learning.

Overall, trusting relationships and mutual respect are the basis of successful lessons, enlivened by good-natured interaction between pupils and staff. Teachers' very secure subject knowledge ensures that pupils benefit from clear explanations and guidance. Teachers understand pupils' prior performance well; they use a wide variety of attainment data to set realistic targets for tests and examinations which helps to raise pupils' aspirations.

Lessons are well structured and pupils know what they are expected to learn. In some subjects, such as art and design, design and technology, drama and physical education, pupils are becoming adept at evaluating their own work against clear criteria and this helps to motivate them further. ICT is increasingly being used to stimulate learning, though not all teachers have full access to the ICT equipment they need. Pupils enjoy lessons where they are directly involved in practical tasks, pair work and discussions. The few instances of inappropriate behaviour in lessons are handled firmly so that learning is not unduly disrupted.

The school has accurately identified the features of teaching that need to be improved further. A few lessons do not include a sufficient variety of activities and the more able are not always fully challenged. The way pupils' work is marked is not always helpful to pupils in identifying clearly what needs to be improved across all subjects.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a good and rounded curriculum which meets the needs of all pupils. There is specific tailored provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, ranging from additional literacy lessons to personalised 'catch up' time. The progress of pupils with learning difficulties and those for whom English is not the first language is carefully monitored and they are guided well throughout their time in school through well conceived and implemented procedures. Recently introduced vocational courses have broadened the opportunities considerably and 'work related learning' effectively extends the choices available to pupils in Year 10 and Year 11. In addition, the school's specialist engineering status has enabled many departments to gain access to additional resources. These have enabled the school to develop aspects of the curriculum in a lively way which pupils find relevant. The impact of the specialist status is spoken of highly by staff of a partner special school whose curriculum is strengthened by its link with the high school and whose pupils make excellent use of its facilities. This is an example of Balshaw's very good links with other community

groups which, taken together, strengthen its own curriculum and enable it to share its expertise beyond the confines of the high school. In addition, specialist status has led to better ICT provision for all years and this is used for courses giving external accreditation for pupils in Year 10 and Year 11.

An impressively rich and extensive variety of extra-curricular activities, catering for pupils of all tastes, is very well organised by the school. It is very well attended and offers pupils an outstanding range of opportunities which complements the formal curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, support and guidance are excellent. Exceptional care and support are underpinned by the school's outstanding Christian ethos and the caring relationships that pervade the school. Year 7 pupils are helped to settle into their new school quickly, and frequent and rigorous checks on pupils' development by house staff mean that all pupils are very well known by staff. The house system is a jewel in the school's crown. As a result, pupils receive the support they need to achieve well. Pupils find staff friendly, helpful and very supportive. They are confident that teachers will help them to sort out any difficulties they face in school. The school has forged many close links with local agencies helping to provide sensitive care for vulnerable pupils.

Pupils' academic progress is well supported. Subject teachers track pupils' progress very closely, identifying and dealing very effectively with any under achievement. The system is especially effective in Key Stage 4 where house, senior and subject staff provide a very good range of precisely focused support. House staff are not yet as closely involved in recognising and supporting underachievement in Year 7 to Year 9 as they are higher up the school. The work of pupils in each tutor group is reviewed in detail by senior staff, giving an exceptionally clear picture of the standards of work and what needs to be done to ensure that pupils achieve what they are capable of doing.

Pupils are well informed of the full range of options at age 14 and age 16, enabling them to make clearly informed decisions about their futures; parents are fully involved.

Procedures for child protection are robust. Risk assessment is carried out for all activities and health and safety procedures are entirely in order.

Grade 1

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good throughout the school. The headteacher has been highly effective in galvanising the whole school to raise standards in recent years. She provides excellent leadership and is supported by an enthusiastic and committed senior staff team. As a result, expectations for pupils' achievement are high, the atmosphere for learning is calm and purposeful, the Christian ethos is exceptionally

strong, the personal development of the pupils is outstandingly good and the links with various parts of the local community are very productive. Management is supported by very thorough reviews of the performance of key areas of the school's activities based on good use of data. Departments carry out detailed and frank reviews of their performance and use this to improve. The house system is very well managed and provides a secure basis for pupils to develop and take part in the life of the school. The governing body is conscientious in its oversight of the school, has a clear picture of how well the school is doing, is kept well informed by the staff, and is active in supporting the day-to-day work of the teachers and pupils. Parents are also well informed about the progress their children are making.

Resources for learning are good and have improved considerably as the school has developed its engineering status. After a major upgrading of accommodation, the school is now located in interlinked buildings and the new parts provide bright and pleasant places for learning. Administration is good and the school runs very smoothly. Staff at all levels are carefully deployed to make good use of their skills and they have good access to in-service training to enable them to develop new initiatives. All adults working with children are properly vetted.

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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?	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	NA

The quality of provision

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

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

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

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The Pupils

Balshaw's Church of England High School

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16 June 2006

Dear Pupils

After our visit to inspect your school I would like to tell you of our findings.

Balshaw's Church of England High School is very good and it is getting better.

Much of the teaching is good or better. The staff work very hard to give interesting lessons which help you to learn well.

You are given a good range of relevant subjects to study. The range of extra-curricular activities is excellent and this does a great deal to make your time in school interesting and enjoyable.

Examination results have improved a lot in the last few years although GCSE results fell back in 2005.

Your time in school is busy and safe, and the vast majority of you behave very well and work hard.

You are rightly proud of your school and take good care of its facilities.

The care and guidance given to you by the staff is excellent.

During your time at Balshaw's you get on very well with each other. You develop extremely well as individuals because of the very good and rounded education the school gives to you.

Although the school is very good overall, improvements are needed to:

improve target setting by senior staff

ensure that all lessons are as interesting as the best

ensure that all of the marking of work helps you to see what you need to do to improve

improve computer facilities in some rooms and use them effectively in lessons.

Yours sincerely

Peter Toft HMI