



St Birinus School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 123259
LEA Oxfordshire LEA
Inspection number 281443
Inspection dates 24 May 2006 to 25 May 2006
Reporting inspector Anne Looney

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Mereland Road
School category	Community		Didcot
Age range of pupils	11 to 19		OX11 8AZ
Gender of pupils	Boys	Telephone number	01235 814444
Number on roll	1247	Fax number	01235 512258
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr C B Turton
Date of previous inspection	8 May 2000	Headteacher	Mr Christopher Bryan

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11 to 19	24 May 2006 - 25 May 2006	281443

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Birinus School is a larger than average comprehensive school for boys aged 11-19. There are 1247 learners on roll, 139 of whom are in the mixed sixth form that the school operates in co-operation with Didcot Girls' school. Learners travel from a wide area, representing a wide social mix and a full range of abilities. It has dual specialist school status, in Technology and Languages. Across the school there are lower than average proportions of learners who are eligible for free school meals, from minority ethnic groups, with learning difficulties and disabilities, or for whom English is an additional language. Learners enter the school with comparatively low levels of reading and writing skills.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school judges its effectiveness to be good. The inspectors agree with this judgement. Learners make good progress over their time at the school when their comparatively low levels of reading and writing skills on entry are taken into account. Senior managers have effectively analysed the data on progress of the present Year 11 and learners are on line to meet the challenging targets that have been set by their teachers. The headteacher and his leadership team provide good leadership and focus the school's efforts on improving standards and learners' personal development. The school has a very clear idea of strengths and weaknesses in the teaching and learning in the core subjects through its thorough monitoring programme. This has not yet been completed as rigorously in all subject areas. Self review is good but the school needs to make better use of a range of data to focus its analysis more precisely. The school makes excellent use of partnerships with others to enhance curricular provision and to promote the well being of the learners. The school's development planning is good and, together with the good improvement made since the last inspection, indicates a good capacity to improve.

The contribution the school makes to learners' personal development is good. Attitudes are predominantly positive and learners respond well to the high level of support they receive and to the range of learning opportunities they are offered. Learners contribute positively to the school and wider community.

Classroom teaching is good overall. The vast majority of learners concentrate well in class, particularly when the tasks are well suited to their capabilities and reading and writing skills. The curriculum is broad, balanced and is increasingly very well suited to the range of needs and aptitudes of the learners. Activities outside the classroom encourage learners' sporting and cultural interests. The school's specialist school status has enhanced provision for learners by the appointment of additional teachers to reduce class sizes and through improved access to technology.

The school is committed to keeping learners safe and deals effectively with any bullying. Systems for maintaining this level of care are good and those for monitoring academic progress are very effective in English and mathematics but not as consistently applied in other subjects. Some learners are better informed than others about how well they are doing and how they might improve.

The school provides good value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The school judges its sixth form to be good and inspectors agree with this judgement. Staff of both schools provide a range of courses that increasingly meets the needs of all students. As one student said, 'You can pretty much choose to study what you like now'. Students progress well and pass rates are higher than average compared with similar schools. This is due to good leadership and management of the sixth form

evident in mutually respectful relationships, and in regular monitoring of students' work to help them improve. Students are confident, motivated and appreciative of the valuable guidance and support they receive.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make more consistent use of assessment for learning to set targets which challenge all learners and then make more consistent use of data to monitor those targets
- Extend the programme of monitoring of teaching and learning throughout the school, involving all middle managers in the process

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good and standards are average throughout the school. Attainment on entry is below average as a result of comparatively low levels of reading and writing skills. Learners make good progress over the key stage with standards at the end of Year 9 in 2005 being in line with national averages. An increasing percentage of learners are attaining higher levels.

The school has established that a small number of learners with learning difficulties and disabilities or those learners whose attainment on entry was low were not making the same progress as their peers. Appropriate support measures have been put in place to ensure the particular needs of those learners are met more effectively and to help them to make good progress.

The proportion of learners gaining five or more high grades at GCSE is increasing. Until recently results have been in line with national averages but evidence gathered during the inspection indicates that standards are rising. Learners are now making good progress in most subjects and are on line to meet the more challenging targets set for them. This success is due to senior managers analysing in detail data on the progress of learners in this cohort and by teachers setting more challenging targets, particularly in English and mathematics.

Students achieve well in the sixth form. In advanced vocational subjects, engineering, business studies and physics standards have been higher than average.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Learners' personal development and well-being are good. Learners enjoy coming to school, their attendance is above average and their attitudes to learning are generally good. On the whole, most learners appreciate the work of the teachers. Inspectors judged behaviour to be good. A small minority of the parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire felt, however, that behaviour was not as good as it might be.

Learners' spiritual, moral, social, emotional and cultural development is good, with social and moral development being particular strengths. Many learners voluntarily take on duties and responsibilities within the school community as prefects, tutor

group helpers and peer mentors to support their fellow learners. They involve themselves fully in cultural activity both within the curriculum and beyond, participating in the many musical groups and choirs, drama events and art gallery and theatre visits. In addition, many benefit from the school's organised trips to other countries.

Learners feel safe at school. They know who to approach when they need help and they feel confident that they will receive it. Incidents of bullying are low and learners say these are dealt with swiftly and effectively.

Learners respond well to the school's encouragement to lead a safe and healthy life. They actively subscribe to sporting activities and other physical exercise. The weightlifting club is a particular favourite. They are alert to matters of safety in lessons and around school. Healthy eating has been actively taken up by many learners and this has been enabled by the effective and active school council.

Learners contribute positively to activities in the local area and the wider community. They acquire knowledge and skills that contribute to their future economic well-being and some benefit from additional vocational opportunities in areas such as engineering.

Personal development is equally good in the sixth form where students are confident, motivated and contribute successfully to the life of the school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and its impact on learning are good.

Teachers have good relationships with learners. They plan lessons well and employ a variety of activities to help learners make good progress. Teachers support their lessons with effective use of a range of resources from information and communication technology (ICT) to word and picture flash cards.

In the best lessons teachers employ a range of learning opportunities such as in the Year 7 technology lessons where pupils worked productively and responsibly in groups to conduct tests on electrical circuits. Behaviour is generally managed appropriately and pupils have no difficulties remaining on task and learning. In a small number of lessons learners find it hard to pay attention because some tasks are not suited to their needs or are written in a way that is too difficult for them to understand.

Learners with learning difficulties and disabilities learn well because of the additional targeted support they receive particularly from learning support assistants. Those learners who are gifted and talented are stretched in a variety of ways including at summer school.

Most learners are fully aware of what they need to do to improve as a result of constructive and helpful marking. Where guidance by teachers is less specific learners are less clear on how they might improve. In the best lessons learners are more fully

involved in their own assessment and encouraged to assess themselves against targets set by the teacher.

The quality of teaching in the sixth form is good enabling students to make good progress. Students appreciate the broader range of teaching and learning styles and the fact that their teachers treat them as adults.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The quality of the curriculum for 11-16 year olds is good. It is broad and balanced and meets the needs of all learners.

The school's specialist school status has enhanced provision for learners by the appointment of additional teachers to reduce class sizes and through improved access to ICT.

All learners develop an understanding of the world of work and the recently introduced key skills curriculum in Year 10 is providing learners with opportunities to acquire practical workplace skills. The new Key Stage 4 'pathways' option system offers a good range of academic and vocational courses catering fully for the range of interest and aptitude.

Careers education is effective and the personal social and health education programme contributes well to learners' development as responsible citizens. The taught curriculum is enhanced by a wide range of sporting, artistic and cultural opportunities.

Sixth form students can choose from an increasing range of examination courses and can combine Advanced and Advanced Subsidiary levels with vocational courses to suit their needs.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Learners receive good care and guidance. As well as a full range of medical, social and emotional support systems provided by adults, learners can also call on the help of peer mentors if they have problems.

There are very good links with local primary schools which help learners to settle into school. Learners in Year 9 receive good guidance in a variety of ways to help them choose the subjects they are to study in Key Stage 4. Careers guidance is well supported by the external advice provided by Connexions.

Vulnerable pupils are very well supported. The work of the behaviour unit makes an outstanding contribution in this area.

Procedures to monitor learners' academic progress are well developed in Key Stage 4 and in some subjects, notably in English and mathematics, but are not consistently applied in all subjects.

There is a good programme of guidance and support for sixth form students. Their performance is monitored throughout their time in the sixth form and they are well prepared for the next stages of education or employment.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good throughout the school.

There is good day to day management which ensures effective communication. Teams are mutually supportive and newly appointed teachers well inducted into the school.

The senior leadership team, supported by an active governing body, sets a clear direction for the school and has developed a shared understanding across the school of the need to focus on achievement and personal development. This has led to improved academic standards over recent years and to a high standard of care for all learners.

There are thorough monitoring systems which identify strengths and areas for development in teaching and learning in targeted subjects and year groups. This has been particularly effective in the core subjects but has not yet been fully implemented across the whole school. The headteacher has observed each member of staff and has a secure knowledge of their teaching skills. Observation of teaching is followed up well by the identification of targets and appropriate development activities to improve skills. However, data is not yet used effectively by all middle managers to support ongoing monitoring and recording of the progress of learners. There is considerable informal monitoring but this is not supported by effective centralised recording systems.

The quality of development planning is good. The plans for the new building are well considered and informed by a good analysis of curricular need. Self review by senior and middle managers has accurately identified the strengths and the areas for development for the school. The school has made good use of a range of evidence to support evaluation but its reliance on historical data led to an initially conservative judgment on learners' standards and achievement.

The school has made very profitable use of its partnerships with other schools, its links with industry and its involvement in initiatives to promote the well being of, and extend provision for, learners.

The school has made good improvement since the last inspection and has good capacity to improve further.

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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	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	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
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	3	3
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?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
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	2	
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?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

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	2	
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	2	
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

Pupils

I am writing on behalf of the inspection team to let you know the judgements we made about your school. Thank you for making us welcome, for always being so ready to help us find our way around your school and for taking the time to talk to us.

* we believe that St Birinus is a good school* the school helps you to make progress by teaching you well and by providing a range of courses to suit everyone* the headteacher and the other senior teachers lead the school well and plan well for the future. They also have a clear picture of what the school does well and what it needs to do to improve* the overwhelming majority of you says that you enjoy your school and that if you need help there are plenty of people to talk to. Many of you offer your help and support to your fellow pupils* you really appreciate the sporting opportunities that the school provides* we thought that your behaviour was good* the school looks after you well and makes sure that you are safe.

Your school needs to:* make sure that you know how well you are doing in all your subjects and set you targets for improvement* make sure that your headteacher and the other senior teachers continue to find out exactly how good teaching is in all subjects.

With best wishes,

Anne Looney HMI

Lead Inspector