



# St Bernard's Catholic High School, Specialist School for the Arts

## Inspection Report

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Better  
education  
and care

**Unique Reference Number** 106963  
**Local Authority** Rotherham  
**Inspection number** 287666  
**Inspection dates** 8–9 November 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Philip Jarrett HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary	<b>School address</b>	Herringthorpe Valley Road
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided		Rotherham
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16		South Yorkshire S65 3BE
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01709 828183
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	659	<b>Fax number</b>	01709 372609
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair</b>	Mgr John Ryan
		<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr David Butler
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	6 February 2001		

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<b>Age group</b>	<b>Inspection dates</b>	<b>Inspection number</b>
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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 Catholic High School is a smaller than average comprehensive school for students aged 11 to 16. It was designated a specialist school for the arts in 2004. The school serves a large catchment area and its intake includes 85% of baptised Catholic students. The students are mostly of White British heritage. Attainment on entry is average. The proportion of students who are eligible for free school meals is below average. The school receives above average numbers of students who have statements relating to learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The current school leadership team has been in post for two years.

## 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 Catholic High School is a good school with some outstanding features. There are particular strengths in the students' personal development and the quality of care, guidance and support is also outstanding. Standards are high and all students make good progress. Senior leaders have a good understanding of strengths and weaknesses. There is no complacency in the school but rather a genuine commitment to further improvement. An illustration of this is that, despite already high standards, the school has introduced a number of significant initiatives within a short period in order to improve provision further. The challenge for senior leaders is to manage these changes effectively. In particular, more support is needed for middle leaders in implementing the changes, including better monitoring and evaluation at subject level. Nevertheless, the school's capacity to improve is good.

The inspection team agreed with all of the school's judgements in their self-evaluation record except for one. The school's view is that achievement is outstanding. The balance of evidence suggests that it is good. This is confirmed by the fact that the attainment of students on entry is broadly average and yet standards are consistently above average at the end of Key Stage 4. However, the evidence available about students' achievement varies from year-to-year in line with changes in test and examination results. Standards are clearly above average and this year's unvalidated GCSE results are the best in the school's history.

The school has an innovative approach to improving teaching and learning. This makes use of teachers-as-researchers and is seeking to produce, with some success, a reflective learning community. This is beginning to have a positive impact and some of the teaching observed during the inspection was of high quality. The best teaching is carefully planned to meet the needs of all students, including the most able, and involves them directly in their learning. Some teaching remains broadly satisfactory. Another challenge for the school is to use the good practice already available to lever up the quality of teaching across all departments.

The school is a very orderly community. Students are polite and respectful and support each other well. Behaviour is very good. Students enjoy school and this is confirmed by high levels of attendance. The quality of care provided by the staff is outstanding. Students feel safe and valued in the school, as most parents acknowledge. The school wishes to improve its procedures still further and introduced new mixed-age form groups in September. This has the potential to make a significant contribution to students' personal development and progress but detailed programmes are not yet in place.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Make further improvements to teaching by planning more carefully for specific groups of students, including the more able, and involving students more directly in their own learning.

- Develop middle leaders' understanding of their role in reviewing, monitoring and evaluating standards and quality.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Standards at the end of both key stages are consistently above average. This represents good achievement in view of the fact that standards on entry to the school are average. The school ensures that nearly all students leave with a good set of academic qualifications: this includes most students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The school's view is that achievement is outstanding overall. However, although standards are high, test and examination results have been variable over recent years, especially at Key Stage 3 where the unvalidated results for 2006 are not as good as 2005. The unvalidated GCSE results for 2006 are the school's best set of results but standards in 2005, though high, were not as good as the previous year. This means that students' achievement varies from year-to-year. Overall, the balance of evidence available confirms that achievement is good.

All groups of students achieve well. The school has focused on raising boys' standards and this has been successful. Test results show that boys achieve at least as well as the girls: this is better than the national picture. The school is now seeking to increase the numbers of students who attain the highest grades at GCSE. This is a sensible aspiration since the inspection confirms that some of the most able students could achieve even more in lessons.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 1**

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Students achieve a very good understanding of the needs of others and demonstrate a high level of social responsibility in the way they conduct themselves around the school. They are polite and listen to each other in lessons. Behaviour is excellent. The Catholic ethos of the school directly underpins students' very good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Students enjoy school. 'It's the best place. Lessons are fun' said a typical Year 7 student. This results in attendance that is well above average. Students feel safe from bullying, racism and other forms of discrimination. They understand well what contributes to healthy living. Indeed, the numbers of students taking school meals has increased following the introduction of healthier options. There is good provision for physical education in the curriculum and the good take-up of after-school sporting activities shows students' good understanding of the need for physical exercise. Standards of literacy and numeracy are above average and students learn of life beyond school through placements and enterprise projects. This prepares them well for the workplace.

Students make a good contribution to the community. They work hard for a range of charities and take on responsibilities, for example, in mentoring younger students.

Students contribute well to decision-making through house and school councils, although many express a desire to have an even greater say in the way the school is organised.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

The full range of evidence shows that teaching and learning are good. Teaching observed during the inspection varied in quality. There is some outstanding practice in the school as well as teaching that is satisfactory.

Students' attitudes to learning are very good. They are keen to do well and persevere with difficult tasks. They are very well motivated: as a result they behave well even in lessons where teaching does not always engage them. All teachers manage classes well and form good relationships. Teaching assistants work effectively in close collaboration with teachers and support students who find learning difficult. In the best lessons students are actively involved, discuss things fully with the teacher and evaluate their own learning. The teaching that is currently satisfactory would gain from better planning in order to meet the needs of groups of students more effectively.

The school has an innovative approach to improving teaching and learning. This involves using a group of teachers to reflect on their own work and to learn from research and other evidence in order to identify and disseminate good practice. This group leads staff development and has helped to produce good quality policies on teaching, learning and assessment. The quality of teachers' marking and feedback to students is good. Some is very good and makes particularly effective use of student self-evaluation and target setting. However, the new policies have not yet been in place long enough to be fully effective across all departments.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 2**

The curriculum meets students' needs well and enables them to make good progress. Particular strengths are the extra time for religious education, which has a positive impact on personal development, and the full programme of physical education which contributes well to the encouragement of healthy lifestyles.

The choice of courses available at Key Stage 4 is limited, with a focus on the core subjects and an academic curriculum. This meets students' needs well. Several vocational courses have been introduced since the previous inspection and the school is seeking to expand this. The arrangements for preparing students for future employment are good, with three weeks of work experience and a range of valuable enterprise activities. The few students who are at risk of dropping out of school are provided with individually planned programmes that often include off-site training and work experience: this helps to keep them 'on track'. The result is that almost all students gain good qualifications in the GCSE examinations.

The school provides a good range of extra-curricular activities, particularly in sport, together with after-school sessions that provide extra support for subjects and identified groups of students, such as the gifted and talented. This has a positive impact on students' learning and their personal development.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 1**

The quality of care, guidance and support for students is outstanding. A dedicated team of staff provides well for the needs of all students and ensures that they are safe and happy. The needs of individual students are carefully assessed and good support provided. Parents are fully included in discussions. Comments from parents confirm the high level of care for individual students which helps them to become confident and make good progress. As a result, students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress.

Individual students' progress is closely monitored on a fortnightly basis. This detailed programme is supported by extensive mentoring support in order to ensure that students meet challenging targets and it has contributed to rising standards. Parents are kept well informed about their children's progress and the school takes parents' views into account when making major decisions. The school has recently introduced mixed age form groups. Expectations about this programme are not yet sufficiently clear and more effective guidance for staff is needed if it is to have the positive benefits envisaged.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides clear direction and vision for the school and is well supported by the senior leadership team and governors. Standards have risen and achievement is good. The governing body provides good support to the school and reviews its own performance effectively as part of the self-evaluation process. The school has a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. The belief that 'every child matters' is central to the school's ethos and its strategic planning.

There is good analysis of data by senior leaders and the monitoring and evaluation of performance has improved since the previous inspection. The specialist arts status of the school is having a positive impact on raising standards across the school. It has also contributed to good links with schools and other partners in the community.

The school has recently introduced a number of significant new developments intended to improve performance. These include staff restructuring, a new system of department monitoring, the development of a teaching and learning group and a new system of mixed-age form groups. Some of these initiatives are already beginning to have a positive impact. However, middle leaders show variable levels of understanding of their roles within the initiatives. The school acknowledges that it needs to provide

further training and guidance, especially in monitoring and evaluation and in using data to inform planning.



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## Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	<b>School Overall</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

### Achievement and standards

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

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	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	2
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	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

### The quality of provision

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

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

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	2
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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

My three colleagues and I very much enjoyed meeting you during our recent inspection.

Thank you for being so friendly and for talking to us so openly about the school.

We were pleased to see that the school provides a good quality of education overall and that some things are outstanding. Most students behave very well and are keen to do their best. We thought you were very polite and respectful around school. Most of you told us that you like coming to school and you feel safe in school. Teachers look after you well and you are happy to talk to them if problems arise.

The progress made by students is good as they move through the school. Standards are above average and you may know that last year's GCSE results were the best in the school's history. All of you make good progress. This is partly because you are so keen to learn and partly because most of the teaching is good. You do especially well in lessons where teachers involve you in learning and make you think. In some lessons, students are not able to participate sufficiently and the work isn't always as hard as it might be.

The school leadership has made a number of important changes recently. This includes the mixed age tutor groups and a new approach to parents' meetings. The inspection team is confident that the headteacher and his colleagues know how to make the school even better. Some of you told us that you would like to have more chance to influence changes in the school.

We have suggested that the school should do a couple of things that will help it to get even better. In some lessons, teachers should try more to involve you in your learning and to find work that meets the needs of all the students. Secondly, we think that the school's senior leaders will need to provide more help to make sure that all the teachers can put the new ideas into place.

Thank you for your help in the inspection and for welcoming us into your school. We enjoyed meeting you and talking to you.