

St Bede's Catholic College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109326
Local Authority	Bristol, City of
Inspection number	288355
Inspection dates	6–7 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Tom Winskill HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	913
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Gordon Nicholas
Principal	Catherine Hughes
Date of previous school inspection	26 February 2001
School address	Long Cross Lawrence Weston Bristol BS11 0SU
Telephone number	0117 3772200
Fax number	0117 3772201

Age group	11–16
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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

This is a smaller than average sized secondary school serving the catholic diocese of Clifton, including parts of Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire. It has been a specialist science school since 2004.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school where pupils' achievement is excellent and where their personal development and well-being are of the highest order. Parents justifiably have a great deal of confidence in the school. One parent rightly described the school as 'a very special learning environment'. Standards achieved by pupils are well above average as a result of good and sometimes outstanding teaching, a flexible curriculum tailored to meet pupils' needs and excellent care, guidance and support. Outstanding leadership and management are successfully improving the quality of provision, raising standards and providing an environment where pupils thrive. A great deal of the school's success is because of the outstanding leadership of the principal, whose vision and relentless drive for improvement permeate the work of the school.

Standards rose sharply in 2006, as shown by GCSE results, and are continuing to rise. The school's thorough monitoring of performance shows that pupils make good progress in Key Stage 3. In Key Stage 4, their progress accelerates and is outstanding. This is a result of the combination of consistently good and better teaching, and a curriculum which closely matches their aptitudes and abilities. The school's specialist status has helped to improve the curriculum provision in science to account for a wide range of abilities and aptitudes. High quality support and guidance and high expectations ensure that vulnerable pupils make outstanding progress.

A great strength of the school is the pupils' personal development and well-being, including their outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This is as a result of the care and commitment of staff and the school's highly inclusive approach. They rightly feel safe and highly valued as individuals. The school is extremely successful in developing the whole person, not just pupils' academic potential. One parent's succinct comment reflects the views of many: 'Sending my son to St Bede's was the best decision we have made for both his educational and personal growth'. Opportunities for personal development, including leadership, are legion. Pupils make an excellent contribution to the school and wider communities. They are very well prepared for the next phase of their lives after St Bede's and the school takes pride in following their further progress. Their behaviour is excellent and they enjoy their education a great deal.

Teaching and learning are good with some outstanding features and no major weaknesses, although highly effective planning to meet all pupils' needs in the classroom is not fully implemented across the school. In some lessons pupils are not given enough opportunity to use their own initiative or work without direct and constant intervention by teachers. Care, guidance and support are superb. The change in 2006 from a year to a house system is further enhancing already high quality provision.

Leadership and management are excellent. The senior leadership team provides excellent support in helping to make the principal's vision come alive. There are no major weaknesses in middle leadership but not all middle leaders have a sufficiently clear understanding of what constitutes outstanding teaching.

What the school should do to improve further

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- Ensure middle leaders work with their teams to develop more outstanding teaching and learning, and that lessons are planned to meet the needs of all pupils.

- Ensure pupils are given more opportunities to work independently of the teacher and take greater responsibility for their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

The 2006 GCSE results were well above average, as shown by the very high proportion of the year group who gained five good GCSEs including English and mathematics. Results in almost all subjects at GCSE were above average. In art, English language and literature, mathematics and the specialist subjects of biology and science, results were well above average, with exceptionally strong performance in design and technology, French and music. Although the results achieved by boys were much lower than those of girls, they still achieved well from their starting points. Standards are rising in Key Stage 4. This is because pupils of all abilities in a range of subjects including English, mathematics and science are now making excellent progress and achieving and often exceeding challenging targets. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is slightly above average but the standards they are achieving in Key Stage 4 are exceptional as a result of the outstanding progress they are making. Standards at Key Stage 3, as shown by national test results in 2006, were above average. Results in English, mathematics and science have been above average for the last five years. In 2006 standards in mathematics were exceptionally high, as were standards in English in 2005. Pupils currently in Key Stage 3 are making good progress. There is no underachievement in any subject or for any group of pupils in either key stage. Vulnerable pupils, including those with learning difficulties or disabilities, make outstanding progress as a result of the high quality support and guidance provided.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Spiritual and moral development lies at the heart of the school's ethos and is a major strength. Pupils learn extremely effectively how to mix with others and have a strong awareness of different cultures. Pupils really enjoy school, particularly where teaching is good or better. Attendance is above average and unauthorised absence is very low. Behaviour is exemplary, as shown by pupils' excellent relationships in lessons, their consideration for others on busy corridors and during social times, and their courtesy towards adults. Pupils feel safe in school and bullying is rare. Pupils consider that when it does occur it is dealt with effectively. Pupils show very positive attitudes towards health and safety and show a healthy regard for the dangers of drugs. They take advantage of the water fountains and partake significantly in sport. They talk knowledgeably about the school's successful efforts to introduce healthier food and the focus on healthy eating in food technology lessons.

Opportunities for pupils to take on responsibilities and use their initiative are excellent. These include collecting for charity, providing support for the local community farm, delivering food to the needy, acting as prefects on school buses and organising house based activities including sports teams. Some pupils visit partner primary schools to help teach French to the younger pupils. They are prepared exceptionally well for the future. Levels of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills are high. Pupils respond enthusiastically to the work-related programmes on offer such as the industry days and work experience. Many pupils take advantage of the opportunity to mentor younger pupils and develop leadership skills through the junior sports leaders' award scheme.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Lessons are well planned and conducted at a good pace with activities which are challenging and maintain pupils' interest. For example, in a good history lesson pupils worked well together in pairs and small groups, discussing the reliability of a particular source of evidence. As result of this, and clear explanations by the teacher, almost all made good progress and some were able to demonstrate understanding in considerable depth. There are good, well-established routines and consistent behaviour management. Working relationships and mutual respect between teachers and pupils are excellent. As a result there is an outstanding ethos for learning which helps pupils make excellent progress. Highly developed questioning skills challenge pupils' thinking and contribute to their outstanding progress. A strength of teaching throughout the school is that staff reflect on their practice and strive to improve. Consequently, weak teaching is rare and the school is actively seeking ways of increasing the amount of outstanding teaching.

In the best lessons, imaginative teaching combined with opportunities to think for themselves in depth help all pupils make excellent progress. For example, in an outstanding geography lesson the use of video, artefacts, textbooks, challenging questions and highly engaging activities enabled pupils to learn a great deal and thoroughly enjoy the lesson. Activities planned for the follow-up lesson were very well matched to meet the needs of the range of ability in the group. Where teaching is less well developed there is a lack of challenge and pace to maintain pupils' involvement in learning. Work is generally matched to pupils' abilities but lesson plans do not take into account fully the range of differing abilities within the same class. Some lessons are over-directed by teachers. This ensures that no-one falls by the wayside but slows the progress of some. These pupils do not have sufficient opportunity to work more independently of the teacher and take more initiative through having more responsibility for their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding because it matches the needs, aspirations and interests of pupils very well. It is an important contributory factor to the pupils' outstanding achievement. For example, pupils with the ability and aptitude are able to take GCSEs early in religious studies, mathematics, modern foreign languages and design and technology. They then undertake more challenging work, including AS levels in some subjects. The Key Stage 4 curriculum is regularly modified to meet the needs of each year group and this reflects the school's inclusive philosophy. The specialist science status ensures that some able pupils can take separate sciences at GCSE. In addition there is a vocational science course and highly effective cross-curricular links between science and several other subjects. Design and technology enterprise schemes are used in each year very successfully to help pupils develop skills which greatly enhance their prospects of future economic well-being. Links with other bodies such as universities and sports organisations widen pupils' experiences and support learning extremely well. There is an outstanding range of extra-curricular activities with very high participation rates, particularly in sport and music. These make an invaluable contribution to pupils' enjoyment of school and help many live healthily. There are good arrangements to support pupils learning outside the school day. For example revision sessions are well thought through and capture pupils' interest and involvement.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school provides a high level of commitment to encouraging the personal development and achievement of all pupils. Staff know the pupils very well and work closely with parents to ensure personal development and well-being are excellent. Vulnerable pupils are given excellent support which enables them to engage fully in the life of the school. Pupils with learning difficulties make excellent progress as a result of highly effective, dedicated support specifically designed to meet their needs. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are robust and kept up to date. The school is a secure site and staff have a strong presence around the school. The personal development programme, including assemblies and celebration of achievement, helps to maintain high expectations of achievement, behaviour and self-improvement amongst pupils. High quality careers guidance helps pupils' preparation for life after St Bede's and an excellent induction programme helps new pupils settle quickly. Academic guidance is strong, including the development of study skills for individual pupils. The move to a house system is helping raise the quality of both academic and pastoral support. Heads of house now have more time to focus on the progress of individual pupils. Links with external agencies to support pupils' welfare are outstanding. The school has taken effective steps to improve attendance.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The principal has secured a shared vision that every pupil should achieve highly and be nurtured in a supportive but challenging environment. This vision has inspired and driven school improvement to focus on learning. As a result the school is continually seeking to evaluate and improve all aspects of provision. For example, the quality of middle leadership has improved significantly as a result of leadership training. Consequently there are no weaknesses in middle leadership although not all middle leaders are clear on how to bring about consistent outstanding teaching in their teams. Where middle leadership is stronger, there are effective procedures to ensure team members learn effectively from each other. Rigorous and sophisticated monitoring and evaluation of pupils' performance are well established. Thorough systems for tracking pupils' progress against challenging individual targets enable any underachievement to be identified and tackled. The regular programme of reviews of subjects and other aspects of the school's work contributes successfully to the well developed understanding of its performance. Performance management is acting as an effective lever to drive up standards and all leaders, including the governing body, share the drive for improvement. The impact of this improving provision can be seen in the rising standards and the pupils' outstanding achievement and personal development. The school has made great strides since the last inspection. This, together with the school's high quality self-evaluation and its proven ability to improve provision and raise standards, ensures its capacity for further improvement is excellent.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
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
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
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?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

¹ 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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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	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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

8 June 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Bede's Catholic College, Lawrence Weston, BS11 0SU

I am writing to inform you of the findings of the recent inspection of your school. I would like to thank you for your help during the inspection, especially those of you who spoke with inspectors either in formal meetings or generally around the school and in lessons. We enjoyed our visit because St Bede's is an outstanding school. Pupils achieve highly and gain excellent examination results. Your development as young people particularly impressed us. Your behaviour is superb. You make the most of the opportunities the school offers. These include sport, music and a very wide range of activities in the school and wider community. Your principal leads the school very well indeed. She and your teachers ensure you are well taught and provide you with care, support and guidance of the highest quality. In such an excellent school without any major weaknesses it is not easy to suggest improvements. I have asked the principal to ensure that:

- you receive more outstanding teaching, especially in lessons where activities are planned to help all individuals and groups make more progress
- you are helped to become less dependent on the teacher and are able to take more initiative and responsibility in developing your work.

I wish you well for the future.

Tom Winskill Her Majesty's Inspector