



St Bernard's Catholic High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 112400
Local Authority Cumbria
Inspection number 289271
Inspection dates 29–30 November 2006
Reporting inspector Andrew Johnson HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Rating Lane
School category	Voluntary aided		Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria
Age range of pupils	11–16		LA13 9LE
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01229 894620
Number on roll (school)	855	Fax number	01229 894622
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Graham Hackett
		Headteacher	Mr Eugene Tumelty
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–16	29–30 November 2006	289271

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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 an average-sized comprehensive school which draws students from the towns of Barrow-in-Furness, Dalton and Ulveston. The socio-economic circumstances of the students are varied, although a high proportion live in areas categorised as disadvantaged. Ten per cent of the students take free school meals which is a little below the national average. Very few students are from minority ethnic backgrounds with only two students having English as an additional language. The proportion of children with learning difficulties and disabilities is slightly below average. The school has specialist status in science.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school which gives good value for money. It has very strong partnerships with primary schools, local colleges, and support agencies. Its status as a specialist Science school has a considerable impact on its overall success.

The standards achieved by students prior to entry to the school vary but are slightly above average. Students reach high standards and their overall progress is good. Results in most GCSE examinations have risen and are well above average. However, in a minority of subjects including mathematics, although results have improved, they are not as high. Students make best progress in Years 10 and 11. In Years 7, 8 and 9 progress is less consistent and, until this year, a significant number of students did not reach the expected level. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities and looked after children make good progress.

Students' good personal development strongly supports their good academic progress. Students behave in a mature and sensible way. They respect each other and their teachers and enjoy learning. Attendance levels are well above average. Most parents are very satisfied with the work of the school. Students' spiritual education is outstanding because the whole school subscribes to its strong Catholic ethos. Healthy eating is encouraged, but there are still problems with students who smoke.

Teaching and learning are good. Students work hard and respond very positively to their teachers. They enjoy lessons because in most cases a variety of teaching techniques and approaches are used. Teachers generally keep a very close eye on students' progress but in a small number of cases marking is not done promptly or precisely enough to provide information to help students improve.

The school provides a good curriculum with a broad range of options that enable students to achieve well. The school has very good arrangements to smooth students' transfer into Year 7, including innovative use of projects developed as part of its specialist science school programme. Science is a particular strength of the school and students make very good progress in this subject. Students benefit from a very wide range of extra curricular activities. They have access to a small number of vocational subjects which the school has plans to increase.

Care, guidance and support are good with some outstanding features. Students feel safe and well supported and there are particularly good arrangements to ensure looked after children achieve well. Students' academic progress is checked closely; however in a small number of lessons students are not aware if they are reaching the expected standards.

Leadership and management are good. The school has an accurate view of its performance and has taken effective action to bring about significant improvement. The headteacher gives very good leadership and has clear priorities for improvement. Effective use has been made of the good practice developed in science to improve teaching. Intervention to improve the tracking of student's progress is not yet effective

across all subjects. Governors support the school well but they recognise that they could improve the way they contribute to the self evaluation process.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve students' progress in Key Stage 3.
- Raise standards and achievement in mathematics.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students make good overall progress and standards are high, but progress is not consistent across all years or subjects. Students enter the school with standards which are slightly above the average. The school builds successfully on these foundations so that when students leave at 16 a high proportion gains five or more good passes at GCSE.

Results at GCSE have improved greatly over the last five years and are now well above average. In 2006 three-quarters of students gained at least five good GCSE results with an improvement on the previous year in the proportion gaining the highest grades. However, the proportion achieving five good GCSEs including English and mathematics is only just above half. Science and English results are particularly impressive. Other strong subjects include design and technology, French and German. The school recognises that achievement could be better in some subjects including mathematics and has taken significant actions to bring about improvements. Students make much faster progress in Years 10 and 11 than in the earlier years. In 2006, according to data gathered by the school, rates of progress in Years 7, 8 and 9 have improved.

The school keeps a close watch on the achievement of boys and girls and recognises that disparities in progress and standards arise from time to time, most often boys doing less well than girls. Several successful interventions have been made to tackle such disparities. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities, looked after children and those in the early stages of learning English make similar progress to other students. Managers set challenging but sensible targets and in most cases these are reached.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal development of students is good. Relationships are very good; most students get on well with each other and with staff. Attendance levels are well above average. Students say they feel safe. Bullying is rare and when identified is dealt with effectively. Behaviour is good. A high proportion of parents are very positive about the school. The number of excluded students is low because the school successfully tackles problems before they can escalate.

Many students participate in high quality physical activities both at lunchtime and after school. This, and improving variety and balance of meals on offer at lunchtime,

contributes well to students' development of healthy lifestyles. The school gives proper emphasis to social and moral issues associated with the misuse of alcohol and drugs. However many students complained to inspectors that this has had insufficient impact on those who habitually smoke and this made some students reluctant to go into the school toilets. Students recognise the importance of behaving in a safe and sensible way in lessons and around the school.

Students' spiritual and moral development is very good because the whole school subscribes to its strong Catholic ethos. Students describe the school as 'a loving environment'. Each year group actively supports a charity. The school council is well established and gives students an opportunity to voice their views. Students are prepared well for life after leaving school through much improved careers advice and work-related enterprise opportunities. A very large proportion of students go on to further education or employment with training.

The school recognises the need to develop further opportunities for students to appreciate and respect the breadth of cultural diversity found in other parts of the United Kingdom.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Students work hard and respond well to their teachers. They enjoy most of their lessons because of the variety of teaching techniques and stimulating approaches used, particularly the use of information technology. Evidence supplied by the school on the quality of lessons was supported by inspectors' observations. The school has correctly identified a small number of subjects where teaching could be improved. In the better lessons teachers match work to students' individual needs and abilities and relate theory to real life situations. For example, in one mathematics lesson the theory of probability was linked to the chances of becoming ill due to smoking. Teachers' very good knowledge of their subject areas enables them to hold their students' attention well. Lessons are generally well planned although there is some variation in the way teachers assess the impact teaching has on learning. Students' progress is usually checked very closely, however in a small number of cases marking is not done well enough to help students improve. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities are well supported by teachers and teaching assistants in lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The good curriculum offered to students prepares them well for further education and employment. Science is particularly strong and standards are high. Students' interest in science is encouraged at an early stage and this enables them to get off to a good start and make good progress. Since the last inspection, improvements have been

made to the curriculum and all students now follow high quality courses in information and communication technology. The small number of vocational courses is being expanded to enable students to make an even wider choice. Older students have been given the option to study separate sciences at GCSE level. The school has developed valuable links with the local further education college and sixth form college that supports smooth transitions for students. High proportions of students progress to suitable programmes of further study. The support needs of students with learning difficulties are well met but the number of qualifications available to them is small.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Good care, guidance and support enable students to develop into mature and responsible learners. For example, students frequently take part in the useful additional revision programmes provided in many subjects. Students recognise the importance of giving everyone a chance to enjoy school and succeed. The pastoral support structure led by the heads of upper and lower school, academic tutors and learning support staff has created a strongly supportive environment. Students' views are sought and listened to. For example, the school council was able to ensure that sports resources were made available at lunchtime and during breaks. Particularly good attention is paid to the support needs of looked after children who generally make good progress. Students' attendance, punctuality and behaviour are closely checked and where students experience difficulties they are well supported. Child protection measures are in place and health and safety measures meet statutory requirements. Students' academic progress is closely tracked in most subjects, though in some cases more could be done to indicate to students what they need to do to improve. Comprehensive and unbiased careers advice ensures that older students make informed choices about their future career paths.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides very good leadership and has a very good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. The self-evaluation process helps the school set accurate priorities for improvement, for example to improve pupils' achievement in mathematics and Key Stage 3 and the performance of a small number of subjects. Good analysis of data has enabled managers to take action to improve the quality of teaching and this has resulted in a significant rise in GCSE results in most subjects, and in the performance of students in Key stage 3 tests in 2006, although there is still room for improvement.

The school's status as a specialist school for science provides benefits for its own students and to the wider community, including several local primary schools. The school has successfully tackled most of the issues raised by the last inspection and demonstrates a good capacity to improve further. Most subject leaders check the work of teachers rigorously although this could be more consistent. Governors work hard

to support the school and are very generous with their time. The school recognises that more training is necessary for governors to enable them to better understand achievement and standards and become more able to support the work of senior staff. Financial control is very strong and the school gives good value for money.

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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?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
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

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ 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

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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	3
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
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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	2
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	3
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

29 November 2006

St Bernard's Catholic High School

Rating Lane

Barrow-in-Furness

Cumbria

LA13 9LE

Dear Students

On behalf of the inspection team I would like to thank you for the warm welcome you gave us. We very much appreciated the opportunity to see you at work and talk to you about the school. It is important that you know what the inspection team found.

We found that almost all of you enjoy school. You work hard in lessons and achieve better results in GCSEs than the national average. There is a lot of good teaching in the school and teachers work hard to make sure you do your best in class. Most of you are aware of your targets and know how you can improve but this is not the case across all of the school. Some of you do not do as well as you should in a few subjects particularly in your first three years. The school is aware of this and has put in place several actions to bring about improvements in Key stage 3.

You are provided with a broad interesting curriculum. There are many opportunities that you take advantage of outside lessons. The headteacher and staff listen carefully to what the school council has to say and have responded well to your views. We were particularly impressed by the school's science specialism and the positive impact that this has on a range of subjects.

The school has a really caring atmosphere and bullying is very rare. Pastoral care is good. You have worked with the staff to set very high expectations of behaviour. We agree with your teachers that behaviour in your school is good. You did tell us there is a problem with smoking in the school and we agree. Staff are trying hard to solve this problem.

We think that the school is very well led by the headteacher and senior staff and are convinced that it has the capacity to improve even further.

To summarise:

- Achievements and standards are good because of good teaching.
- The school is a safe and very caring environment with well-behaved students
- The school is well led and managed and has a varied curriculum
- Progress in a small number of subjects and year groups could improve.

You can help most of all by continuing to enjoy working hard and maintain your positive attitude to study. We wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Johnson

Her Majesty's Inspector