



St Bernard's High School and Arts College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 115381
Local Authority SOUTHEND-ON-SEA
Inspection number 290227
Inspection date 5 October 2006
Reporting inspector John Mitcheson HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Milton Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Westcliff-on-sea
Age range of pupils	11–18		Essex SS0 7JS
Gender of pupils	Girls	Telephone number	01702343583
Number on roll (school)	725	Fax number	01702390201
Number on roll (6th form)	124		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Pat Blight
		Headteacher	Mrs Pat Barron
Date of previous school inspection	21 January 2006		

Age group	Inspection date	Inspection number
11–18	5 October 2006	290227

© Crown copyright 2006

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

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

Description of the school

St Bernard's high school and arts college is an 11-18 Catholic Voluntary Aided school for girls, serving Southend-on-Sea and its surrounding area. It is smaller than average, with 725 girls in the main school and 124 students in the sixth form. The school became a specialist arts college in 2004. It has a strong Catholic ethos and is over-subscribed. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below average, as is the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational need. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is below average but increasing. Attainment on entry to the school is above average. The school selects a small proportion of pupils for entry into Year 7 each year.

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. Its Christian values of respect, service and justice forms the basis for the spiritual, moral, social, cultural and intellectual development of every pupil. Parents praise the school for its achievements and for the richness of the education it provides for their children, commenting that it 'encourages pupils to believe in themselves, aim high mentally, physically and socially, and develop a sense of moral values and responsibility to the wider world'. St Bernard's consistently achieves very high standards; this year's results have improved further and are exceptional. The school aims to provide all pupils with opportunities to succeed in a wide range of curricular and enrichment activities. Its specialist arts status allows pupils to excel in music, drama and dance activities and produce art work, including textiles of exceptional quality. Many pupils participate in school sport and achieve success in a range of team games. They are expected to engage in voluntary work in the local community, become young sports leaders and work in 'ministry teams' to enhance the spiritual ethos of the school. Parents appreciate this, commenting that 'the school encourages participation in activities beyond the purely academic, allowing the girls to grow into confident young women'. The school meets the needs of a diverse population, including an increasing number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. It is a highly inclusive school that accommodates pupils of all abilities and interests. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities achieve well due to the intensive support they receive and the way they are encouraged to be confident and take an active part in the life of the school. Pupils are keen to share their views of the school; they say that it is a friendly school, and 'once you've been here for one day it's like you've been here five years'. Their positive attitudes and excellent behaviour enrich the learning environment and create a safe and welcoming school in which all pupils feel they have a part to play in helping others. The school council consults regularly with the headteacher on issues such as improving school catering. They feel that they are listened to and have a role to play in the development of the school. St Bernard's is a highly successful school as a direct result of outstanding leadership and management. The headteacher and her senior form a highly committed team; members share the highest ambitions for the school and display a corporate responsibility in ensuring pupils receive the very best education. Self-evaluation is accurate and rigorous in its pursuit of further improvement. Results are outstanding and are improving because data is used extremely well throughout the school to identify individual capabilities, set targets and regularly track how they are progressing. Consequently, nobody is allowed to slip behind or to cruise along without being sufficiently challenged, and the vast majority make good progress. Whilst pupils can select from an impressive range of GCSE courses, opportunities to pursue vocational qualifications are limited. The school is highly effective at identifying where improvements can be made. Teaching and learning are consistently good and some teaching is exceptional because the school has worked hard to reduce the amount that is only satisfactory and increase the amount of good and better lessons.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form is good. Standards dipped slightly this year but remain above national averages. Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. An increased number of students have joined the sixth form this year, indicating students' and parents' satisfaction with the school. Teaching and learning are consistently good but the curriculum provides too few opportunities for students to pursue vocational courses. The senior leadership team is making subject leaders more accountable for the standards achieved in the sixth form and requiring them to make further use of the good practice evident in the main school, particularly using assessment data to raise achievement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Introduce vocational courses in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form that makes full use of the excellent facilities on site and enhance overall provision. - Ensure the improvement strategies used to raise achievement in the main school become firmly embedded in the sixth form.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

The majority of pupils enter the school with attainment levels that are above the national average and make good progress throughout Key Stage 3; results in national tests at the end of Year 9 are consistently well above average. For example, in 2006 the school exceeded the challenging targets it set for itself, and over two thirds of pupils achieved Level 6 or higher in English and mathematics. Standards in Key Stage 4 have been consistently well above national averages for the past four years. The proportion of pupils achieving at least 5 A*-C grades in GCSE examinations increased from 78% in 2005 to 85% this year. In addition, two thirds of Year 11 pupils achieved five good passes including English and mathematics and almost every pupil achieved five or more GCSE pass grades. Below average GCSE religious education results in 2005 increased significantly this year with over three quarters of pupils achieving at least a C grade.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Pupils enjoy coming to school and attend regularly. They refer to school as 'a community where people look after you and make you feel like they want you to be here'. They appreciate the personal support provided by teachers and support staff to help them achieve well. They contribute to the life of the school by taking responsibility and developing

leadership skills; the proportion of pupils involved in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award is exceptionally high. Older pupils make an excellent contribution towards the Catholic ethos of the school by volunteering their time and support to lead projects, represent the school in sports and arts activities, and act as prefects and mentors for younger pupils. Many pupils, particularly those in the sixth form, engage in fund-raising or volunteering to support community groups. Pupils say school is a safe place to be, one child said 'it is a place where it's easy to make friends and everybody is kind'.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Overall, teaching and learning are good. The school's own evaluation judges teaching and learning to be good but recognises that some is only satisfactory. It has worked hard to develop greater consistency by focusing on effective ways of engaging and challenging learners in all subjects. In lessons, pupils are stimulated, eager to learn and keen to respond to questions. Interactive whiteboards are used often and well by teachers and pupils have easy access to computers in lessons and during personal study. Learning is planned so regular checks can be made of pupils' understanding and nobody is left behind. For example, pupils use individual whiteboards in some lessons to illustrate that they understand and are ready to progress. Some teaching is only satisfactory because questioning is not targeted and relies upon the first pupil to respond with their hand up. Senior leaders are not complacent about this and teachers are challenged and supported to improve their teaching so all pupils achieve equally in all subjects. Assessment is used exceptionally well to set targets, to provide learning support assistant help for those who need it and to set new challenges for those who are achieving well but could be stretched further. Assessment targets also form the basis of what is expected of each teacher and subject leader by senior managers, particularly in English, mathematics and science. These procedures have been instrumental in raising individual pupil achievement in identified subjects and improving results in recent tests and examinations

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

A good curriculum offers a range of GCSE courses and is enriched through a wealth of after-school clubs, educational visits, visitors, productions and ceremonies. Alternative curriculum arrangements are made for a small group of pupils who find difficulty with maintaining progress in their GCSE courses. However, few vocational opportunities exist in Key Stages 4 or 5. The school recognises the need to expand the curriculum and increase pupils' choice. It envisages vocational courses in its arts specialism would increase choice and make full use of the excellent facilities on site.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. The distinctive caring ethos in the school ensures that all pupils feel valued, they enjoy school life and show care and respect for others. They feel safe in school and effective procedures to care for vulnerable pupils are well managed. Pupils talk very positively about how pupils support each other, particularly through the buddies system for new pupils joining the school and the 'big sister' mentors in the sixth form. Learning support assistants support lower ability pupils and help others to re-engage with learning by spending time with mentors in the learning access room. The school provides excellent academic guidance for its pupils; regular reviews involving them, and, at times parents help to clarify expectations and set targets for pupils to aspire to.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are outstanding. The exceptional leadership of the headteacher and her highly effective senior team has led to significant improvements in a relatively short space of time. Improved selection, induction, training and support of staff has raised the quality of teaching and learning, and enhanced subject leadership. Use of assessment data is more sophisticated and self-evaluation is refined, accurate and clearly identifies priorities for improvement. Senior leaders and governors recognise the progress made since the previous inspection and the need to extend the successful improvement strategies throughout the school. The team is consultative, reflective and rigorous in its pursuit of further improvement; the capacity to improve further is outstanding.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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
--	-----------------------	--------------

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	2
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	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	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	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?	1	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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
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	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	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

6 October 2006 St Bernard's High School and Arts College, Milton Road, Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex, SS0 7JS Dear Students Earlier this week I visited your school and found it to be an outstanding school. Your input was vital in helping me to make this judgement, so thank you for allowing me to join you in lessons and to talk with some of you, especially the members of the school council who were quite enchanting. I also spent time with some of your teachers in lessons, met the chair of governors and read many letters from parents. Throughout all this, your behaviour was exceptional and you made me very welcome. I was greatly impressed with many aspects of the school, including the high standards achieved and the many successes of pupils in sports, the arts and in community work. Your enjoyment in school life is reflected in the willingness of so many of you to take responsibility, lead by example and work to improve the lives of others, within and outside of school. The care and respect shown for each other is exemplary, and contributes directly towards making this an outstanding school that you and your parents are pleased with. Sixth form students present very good role models for younger members of the school. Teachers help you very much by caring for you, by providing a wealth of clubs, activities and visits for you to take part in, and by planning lessons that stimulate your interest. I have asked your senior teachers to do two things to improve further: - introduce more vocational courses into Key stage 4 and the sixth form to give you a wider choice of qualifications - raise achievement in the sixth form so results are equally as outstanding as they are in the main school. The headteacher and her staff lead and manage your school extremely well. You can help them to make the school even better than it already is by asking your school council representative to share your views about the school with senior teachers. Once again thank you for your kind welcome, I wish you all well. John Mitcheson Her Majesty's Inspector