



St Bede's Roman Catholic High School, Blackburn

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 119793
Local Authority Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number 291545
Inspection dates 17–18 January 2007
Reporting inspector Mark Williams HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Livesey Branch Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Blackburn, Lancashire
Age range of pupils	11–16		BB2 5BU
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01254 202519
Number on roll (school)	1022	Fax number	01254 203801
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Father Stephen Doyle
		Headteacher	Mr John C Challoner
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2001		

Age group 11–16	Inspection dates 17–18 January 2007	Inspection number 291545
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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 average sized secondary school is one of two Roman Catholic high schools in the borough. Students enter school with standards broadly in line with national averages. The percentage of students known to be eligible for free school meals is average, as is the proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Nearly all students are of White British heritage with very few whose first language is not English. The school became a specialist sports college in September 2003. It holds a number of awards including Sports Mark and Healthy School status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Bede's is a good school. It provides a good education for its students and offers good value for money. All major areas of its performance are judged to be good. This confirms the accuracy of the school's evaluation of its performance although it was too modest in its view of achievement and standards, basing its judgement on a dip in GCSE performance in 2006.

Good leadership and management have refocused the school's attention on the progress students make in their learning. The senior leadership team, driven by the strong leadership of the headteacher, has invested heavily in ensuring good quality teaching is a growing feature throughout the school. It has been successful in its efforts. For example, it has employed the services of a teaching and learning coach and regularly monitors the quality of teaching. All staff are held accountable for students' learning. Even so, teachers' planning does not always take into account the different ability levels within each class nor promote opportunities for students to participate in their learning. It has been successful in promoting the personal development and well-being of students, nearly all of whom are well behaved and display very positive attitudes to their learning. As a result of these measures and attributes, students make good progress in their learning. Standards are rising steadily in Key Stage 3. In 2006, results in English, mathematics and science tests were significantly above average although the proportion achieving the higher levels has not been as high as it could be in recent years. The percentage of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A*–C dipped in 2006, but students in Years 10 and 11 are on course to meet challenging targets in 2007 and 2008.

Students' progress in learning and personal development is enhanced by the curriculum and levels of care, guidance and support, which are of good quality. Students' personal development is further enhanced by the school's sporting specialism. For example, a number of students are involved in the sports leadership programme and carry out work in local primary schools that is very well received.

The school has developed effective systems for evaluating its performance. As a result, it knows its strengths and areas for development well. However, when good practice is identified it is not always extended consistently throughout the school. Progress has been made in addressing the issues raised in the previous inspection although provision for information communication technology (ICT) in Key Stage 4 is still developing. These improvements, coupled with current successes, demonstrate the school's good capacity to make further improvements.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the proportion of students attaining the higher levels in Key Stage 3 tests.
- Ensure teachers' planning takes into account the different ability levels in each class and promotes opportunities for wider pupil participation in their learning.
- Ensure that identified good practice is shared and developed throughout the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Based on the 2006 GCSE results the school judged achievement and standards to be satisfactory. Inspectors judge them to be good.

In 2006, the number of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A*–C fell from the record numbers achieved the previous year. This was the result of a small number of subjects performing less well than previously owing to difficulties in staffing. In the three years prior to 2006, standards were generally above average and students' progress was good. The resolving of staffing issues and improvements to teaching is ensuring students are once again making good progress. The school's effective systems for tracking pupil progress, good rates of learning observed in lessons and high quality work seen in books show the school is on course to meet its challenging GCSE targets in 2007 and 2008.

Progress in Key Stage 3 is good. Standards achieved in national tests in English, mathematics and science have been rising steadily and were significantly above average in 2006. This represents good achievement although the proportion reaching the higher levels in recent years has not been as high as it could be. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress in their learning because of the high quality support given. Good systems for tracking students' progress enable the school to provide effective extra support or challenge when required.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal development and well-being of students are good. They are able to make good progress because they are well-behaved in lessons, along corridors and in the playground. Good progress is also made because most students attend regularly, responding well to the encouragement the school gives. Students are safety conscious. They develop good social and interpersonal skills, especially in lessons where they work collaboratively and by participating in the wide range of additional activities.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered through personal, social, health and citizenship education, assemblies and through many fundraising initiatives for which they are responsible. A group of students, working with other local schools to create a 'My Home Town' DVD, explored among other things community cohesion in Blackburn with Darwen, developing their cultural understanding.

Older students take responsibility for supporting younger ones. Students are beginning to have more opportunities to express their views through recent initiatives such as the school council and the pupil voice team. They make a positive contribution to the local community through their support of local schools in developing physical education, working with a special school and creating a community rose garden. One pupil represents Blackburn with Darwen as the Youth MP.

Most students enjoy their education and the good range of extra-curricular opportunities, particularly in music and sport. They particularly enjoy lessons where they are able to participate actively. Students respond well to the encouragement they receive to live healthily and are making healthy choices at lunchtimes. They are developing good literacy, mathematical and ICT skills, which prepares them well for the world of work. Some Year 10 students are Enterprise Challenge Champions for the local authority. The majority go on to further education and some on to work-based learning and employment.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good and enables students to make good progress in their learning. The impact of the teaching and learning coach and the focus on 'Assessment for Learning' have been positive. As a result, students typically are clear about what they are to learn. Teachers engage them well through a variety of interesting activities. For example, to ensure Year 11 students gained a thorough understanding of key characters in *Of Mice and Men*, the teacher engaged the students in small group activities to find information through quotations and inference. Students worked enthusiastically and reported articulately their findings to the rest of the class. In another lesson, students improved choreography in dance through assessing each others' movements. Pupil relationships and behaviour in lessons are good and this creates a safe and purposeful environment for students to learn.

Typically, lessons are tailored to meet the range of abilities in each class and promote opportunities for students to be engaged in their learning. However, this is not always the case and progress in these lessons is less rapid.

Support staff are confident in their role and when they are deployed effectively have a positive impact on learning. Homework is set regularly. Teachers' marking of work is good. Where it is most effective, it provides clear guidance to students on how to improve their work. Students appreciate these helpful comments and use them to secure higher levels of achievement.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. The school modifies it appropriately to meet the needs of all students. For example, the time allocated to science in Key Stage 3 has been increased since the last inspection. This has been well received; although the full impact on achievement and standards is not yet demonstrable. The curriculum at Key Stage 4 includes a good range of academic, vocational and skill based courses although provision for ICT is mixed in Year 11. The school is aware of this and has plans for improvement in place. Good provision exists for the few students at risk of exclusion, including

alternative curriculum provision. Effective links have been developed with the school's partners in response to individual needs.

Gifted and talented students access a good enrichment programme and departments deliver an appropriate level of challenge. The curriculum supports students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities well and they make good progress.

Students' learning and personal development is enhanced by a good and varied range of educational visits and extra-curricular activities. Most students take good advantage of these opportunities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of care, guidance and support is good and supports students' learning, progress and well-being. Procedures for safeguarding students and risk assessments for outdoor activities are in place. The majority of students say bullying is dealt with effectively and that there is always someone to listen to them if they have any concerns.

Students are cared for well. Induction arrangements from primary school are good and enable students to settle into their new school quickly. Students and their families are welcomed to the school with a special mass. As they progress through school, students receive good academic, pastoral and post-16 guidance which allows them, for example, to make good option choices. Good partnerships exist with the Connexions service. Pastoral support is particularly strong and enhanced by the effective use of learning mentors. As a result of the good quality care, guidance and support, students are confident to ask for support and advice and teacher–pupil relationships are good.

Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported well by their teachers and the knowledgeable learning support team. Those with English as an additional language receive good bilingual support. The school system of rewards – 'Bede's Points' – is also having a positive effect on students' attitudes to their learning. This is particularly the case in the lower school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher leads the school very effectively. His vision powerfully conveys the principle that every child does matter and provides a clear direction for the school. With the active support of a hard-working and committed senior leadership team, he has accurately identified the strengths and weaknesses of the school. A realistic agenda for development, making good use of the school's specialism, is in place and staff are responding positively. Students' current good progress in their learning and personal development and well-being is a measure of success already achieved and demonstrates the school's capacity to improve further.

Planning for improvement is founded on whole school and subject self-evaluation. This is monitored effectively and is developing well. Good professional development

opportunities are helping to underpin this improvement. Subject leaders are generally well informed about whole school initiatives, such as 'Assessment for Learning'. Most are becoming increasingly effective in checking on the performance of their subjects although good practice is not always consistently shared or acted on.

Governors are experienced, know the school well, and provide effective support for the headteacher, staff and students. They presided over the school's successful application for specialist college status. Issues from the last inspection have mainly been dealt with successfully, although progress towards meeting requirements for ICT in Years 10 and 11 has been slow. Financial management is strong. Staff and resources are well deployed, and the school gives good value for money.

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

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?	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

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	3
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
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	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

St Bede's Roman Catholic High School

Livesey Branch Road

Blackburn

Lancashire

BB2 5BU

17 January 2007

Dear Students

Many thanks for your warm welcome when we inspected your school recently. This letter is to let you know that we agree with the staff and governors that St Bede's is a good school.

We particularly liked:

- your good behaviour and attitudes to learning
- the progress you make in your learning and personal development (although we want more of you to achieve the higher levels at Key Stage 3)
- the way Mr Challoner and the senior leadership team lead and manage your school. We have asked that the many good things happening become a consistent feature of your school
- the good teaching and support you receive in lessons. We could see you especially enjoyed learning when you could fully participate in your lessons. We have asked your teachers to make sure their planning takes this into account and includes activities for all levels of ability
- the good curriculum both in and out of school which provide you with a good range of experiences to develop skills and learn from
- the way your teachers and support staff care for you and give you good guidance for the future.

We are confident you will all work together to make St Bede's even better!

Our very best wishes to you all for the future!

Mark Williams

Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools (on behalf of the inspection team)