

St Benet Biscop Catholic Voluntary Aided High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122367
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	292384
Inspection dates	13–14 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Ann Wallis

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	870
6th form	200
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Anne Hardy
Headteacher	Mr Nick Bowen
Date of previous school inspection	1 January 2002
School address	Ridge Terrace Bedlington Northumberland NE22 6ED
Telephone number	01670 822795
Fax number	01670 829427

Age group	13–18
Inspection dates	13–14 March 2007
Inspection number	292384

© Crown copyright 2007

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 four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Benet Biscop is an average sized Catholic high school with a sixth form of over 200 students. It gained specialist status for business and enterprise in 2005. The school serves a wide catchment area, admitting mostly the students from a small number of Roman Catholic middle schools but also a significant proportion of others. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is below average. Few students are from minority ethnic groups and few do not have English as their first language. The proportion of students with special educational needs is below average whilst the proportion with a statement of special educational need is above average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Benet Biscop is a good and improving school with many outstanding features. The personal development of students and the care, guidance and support they are given are outstanding. This is a truly caring community where students are keen to succeed as individuals but also recognise their responsibilities to others. Parents and students are overwhelmingly supportive of their school. Parents' comments included, 'My child has made excellent progress since entering this school and has already surpassed the expectations and targets that were set for him' and 'I do feel that the school helps produce well rounded young people who not only attain high standards but who are also aware of what being a 'good person' entails'.

The well-being, enjoyment, safety and achievement are at the heart of the school's work. Students' personal and academic progress is tracked very carefully and staff are quick to intervene if a student is falling behind in their work. Students really value the highly personal input they receive from form tutors and mentors.

Students enter the school in Year 9 with standards which are broadly average. They make good progress as they move through Key Stages 3 and 4 to reach above average standards at the end of Year 11. All students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well. However, the school is not complacent and recognises that in order to improve already good achievement further, it needs to increase the proportion of students gaining the higher A and A* grades in GCSE examinations.

Students achieve well because teaching and learning are good and an outstanding curriculum is well matched to their needs. Some teaching is outstanding and in these lessons students really enjoy their learning and make rapid progress. In about a third of lessons, where teaching is satisfactory, the pace of learning is slower.

The acquisition of specialist business and enterprise status has had a major impact on the work of the school. It has enriched the curriculum, improved resources and helped the school to forge excellent partnerships with local business, outside agencies, other schools and voluntary organisations. All of these, and the many extended services which the school provides, have given students outstanding opportunities to develop their workplace skills and contribute to the community.

The headteacher's clear vision for the school, which is shared by all staff, has led to a marked improvement in students' standards and achievement in recent years. Senior leaders have created a real learning ethos within the school. This, combined with an atmosphere of mutual respect and support, allows students to thrive.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is good and it gives good value for money. Recent improvements in the care, guidance and support given to students and specifically in the way their progress and attendance are now tracked are ensuring that students achieve well. Attainment is improving and, in 2006, A level examinations' students reached standards which were just above the national average. Most students achieved well given their capabilities and starting points. Students achieve well because teaching is good. In some lessons, where teaching is particularly knowledgeable, pace is brisk and activities are very challenging; in these lessons, teaching and learning are outstanding.

Students' personal development is outstanding. They are very mature, confident and caring individuals who are keen to succeed but also clearly recognise their responsibilities to the school and wider community. They give very generously of their time in supporting younger students and gain great enjoyment from contributing to whole school fund raising, dramatic and enterprise projects. Very few students drop out of their sixth form courses because the curriculum is well matched to their needs. Sixth form accommodation has improved since the last inspection and students now have much better access to computers and quiet work areas.

The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. They have been strengthened recently by a new tutor team and stronger line management. The school rightly grades the work of its sixth form as good. However, improvements to its effectiveness are very recent. New systems for monitoring students' progress have yet to become embedded and the analysis and use of examination data are not yet sharp enough. A priority for the school is to increase the pace of improvement in students' standards and achievement in the sixth form to match that which has been achieved by students in the main school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the pace of improvement of standards and achievement in the sixth form.
- Share good practice further in order to raise the proportion of teaching that is good or better.
- Raise the proportion of students gaining the higher A*/A grades in GCSE examinations.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Inspectors found achievement to be good and standards to be above average across the school. Standards and achievement have improved markedly in recent years but the school is not complacent and has a relentless focus on teaching and learning in order to improve standards and achievement further. The school recognises, and their own data indicate, that more students are capable of achieving the highest A* and A GCSE grades.

Students take national tests after only two terms in the school. In 2005 and 2006, results in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science were above average and maintained the upward trend of the previous three years. All students achieved well and the school's targets were exceeded.

GCSE examination results were above average in 2005 and improved further in 2006 also maintaining an upward trend. Students achieved well. Students achieved best in design and technology and drama, and least well in engineering. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well. The school's challenging GCSE targets were met.

Examination results in the sixth form are just above average and have improved steadily over the last three years. Most students achieve well. In 2006, virtually all students successfully completed their A level courses with 40% achieving A or B grades.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The personal development and well-being of all students, including those in the sixth form, are outstanding. Students have very positive attitudes to learning and behave very well,

particularly when moving around the school. Attendance is satisfactory and the school is making exhaustive efforts through collaboration between students, parents and the attendance officer to improve this further.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The school's Catholic ethos underpins the excellent teaching of spirituality and of social and moral values. Students regularly reflect on the plight of those less fortunate than themselves by supporting good causes. Students have a very good understanding of a range of cultures through contact with visitors; such as, a Ghanaian FairTrade chocolate producer, plus many visits abroad. They are given many opportunities to take responsibility in the school and outside community. Photographs and press articles confirm the high levels of enjoyment and success of students in activities that have been organised in workplace and community settings. Successful enterprise and teamwork have led to students reaching the national final of the 'Young Enterprise' competition and also to the publication and strong sales of a collection of short stories written by students for 7 to 8 year olds.

Students are exceedingly well informed about staying healthy and safe, and acquire a rich variety of skills to support their economic well-being. They are very self-confident and talk enthusiastically about the opportunities available to them and about how much they enjoy what they do. Students say that they really feel that their voice is heard and that they have an influence on school life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The quality of teaching and learning in the main school and in the sixth form is good. Some teaching is outstanding. Teachers are knowledgeable, plan their lessons well and know exactly what they want their students to learn. In the best lessons, teaching and learning styles are varied and good use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) so students are fully engaged in their work and enjoy what they are doing. There are very good relations between students and their teachers in such lessons and progress is good. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress and many benefit from good individual support given by teachers and learning support assistants. Students learn well on their own but also share information and ideas in a mature way when working in groups. In lessons that are satisfactory, expectations are lower, planning and resources are less well developed and some higher attaining students are less well challenged. Some students' attention begins to wander and progress is slower.

The school has made significant progress since the last inspection in improving teaching and learning. Better quality assessment, more rigorous tracking of students' progress, much increased use of ICT and clear guidelines to help students improve their examination grades have all contributed to rising standards and improving achievement.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is outstanding in the main school and good in the sixth form. It offers students in Years 10 and 11 a very extensive range of courses including traditional GCSEs and applied and vocational options. In this way, it is personalised to meet the needs of individual students very well. In Years 12 and 13, the range of courses offered is less extensive but still meets students' needs well. Specialist business and enterprise status has had a very beneficial impact on the curriculum. All students in Years 10 and 11 now take an ICT option and exciting learning takes place during the special enterprise days, which are held each year. A very well planned core studies programme in each year group includes personal, social and health education and citizenship. It also very successfully addresses age-related issues such as guidance for option choices, work experience and examination preparation. It is underpinned by philosophy for children, which encourages critical thinking and decision-making. Links with local colleges, schools and businesses are excellent and considerably enrich curriculum provision.

The school offers an outstanding range of extra-curricular activities in which students participate in large numbers. These are as diverse as sporting clubs, a music technology club, a catering club, trips abroad, organising a party for senior citizens and involvement in mathematics challenges.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

The care, guidance and support of students in the main school are outstanding and, in the sixth form, they are good.

Students in the main school receive excellent academic guidance. Their progress is tracked very carefully by subject teachers, form tutors, heads of learning and members of the senior leadership team who intervene to support students when needed. In the sixth form, the full impact of recent improvements to the quality of academic guidance students receive has yet to be seen.

All safeguarding and child protection procedures are firmly in place and are rigorously applied. Students can readily approach a staff member if they are troubled or need to discuss a personal issue. Vulnerable students benefit from very good links with staff from a wide range of outside agencies. The flexible provision in school and the inclusion centre ensures these students' needs are met very well.

Advice and guidance to students on course content, options and examination requirements are very detailed and timely. A very good Year 10 assembly was used to reflect on how students might realise their potential through discussion with representatives from 21 businesses attending school the following week.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher's very clear vision for the school has been instrumental in bringing about a marked improvement in standards and achievement for students in Years 9 to 11 and in promoting their excellent personal development. He has deployed and supported existing staff very well whilst also making new staff appointments, which have strengthened leadership at all levels. Morale is high.

Senior leaders work as a very capable team and some have been empowered by taking on new roles, all focused on leading learning. This has helped to ensure that leaders are more proactive in monitoring academic progress and students receive high quality academic guidance. Lessons are monitored regularly and senior leaders know the strengths and weaknesses of teaching well. However, despite the good work of advanced skills teachers in sharing best practice, a third of teaching and learning remains satisfactory.

Governors know the school well, are very involved in its day-to-day work and are committed to its improvement. Although the school was generous in its assessment of its overall effectiveness as outstanding, senior leaders do evaluate the work of the main school thoroughly and know its strengths and weaknesses well. They are aware that monitoring of the work of the sixth form needs to be more rigorous in order to improve standards and achievement post-16.

Finances are very well managed and the school provides good value for money. The school has a good record of improvement since the last inspection. Their talented and hard working staff, who are very well led, have good capacity to improve the school further.

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.

Annex A

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?	2	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	2	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	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	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	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 Benet Biscop Catholic Voluntary Aided High School

Ridge Terrace

Bedlington

Northumberland

NE22 6ED

14 March 2007

Dear Students,

Thank you very much for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school. We are particularly grateful to all of you who took time to talk to us and tell us about the many strengths of your school.

What we have said about your school in the inspection report.

- You reach above average standards and achieve well.
- Teaching and learning and the leadership and management of your school are good.
- Care, guidance and support are outstanding in the main school and good in the sixth form.
- The curriculum is also outstanding in the main school and good in the sixth form.
- Your personal development is excellent.

What we have asked your school to do now.

- Increase the pace of improvement of standards and achievement in the sixth form.
- Raise the proportion of teaching that is good or better.
- Raise the proportion of students gaining the higher A*/A grades in GCSE examinations.

Yours is already a good school with outstanding strengths. You can help it improve even further by attending school regularly and working with your teachers to achieve the very best you can.

Yours sincerely

Ann Wallis

(Lead inspector)