

Stuart Bathurst Catholic High School College of Performing Arts

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104020
Local Authority	Sandwell
Inspection number	308485
Inspection dates	14–15 November 2007
Reporting inspector	David Cox

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	826
6th form	106
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Colin Fortune
Headteacher	William Branney
Date of previous school inspection	28 February 2005
School address	Wood Green Road Wednesbury WS10 9QS
Telephone number	0121 5561488
Fax number	0121 5563985

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Stuart Bathurst is a smaller than average secondary school. The large majority of students are from White British backgrounds although over one quarter of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds, including students of Indian, Pakistani and Caribbean backgrounds. The proportion of students whose first language is not English is above average. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above the national average as is the proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There has been a significant turnover in teaching staff in the last two years including the appointment of the headteacher and the director of 14 to 19 education.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Stuart Bathurst is a satisfactory school, which is improving rapidly. Good leadership and management are ensuring standards of attainment are rising at a faster rate than those nationally. The headteacher along with governors and other members of the senior leadership team are united in tackling underachievement, and the school has demonstrated that it has a good capacity to improve further. Parents are generally supportive of the school but a small minority expressed concerns about students' behaviour. However, inspectors found behaviour to be good because the school has successfully implemented strategies to address the concerns noted by the previous inspection. Students are aware of the good quality care and support they receive. They speak highly of the Christian ethos that underpins the harmonious atmosphere in the school and students' enjoyment of school life. One student commented, 'I like all the support I get from staff and friends that enables me do well.' Pupils know how to stay healthy and many participate in the numerous clubs that are available after school. As a result of the good relationships that exist in the school, students talk regularly to staff and to other students about any concerns they may have. Most students are cooperative and eager to learn. Many attend the revision schools during holidays. Students give their time to contribute to community projects. Through their performing arts' courses, students have worked with pupils from a variety of primary schools. They raise money for different charities and Year 11 students arrange a Christmas meal for senior citizens from a local nursing home.

Students acquire a good understanding of business enterprise and the wider community through 'Enterprise Weeks', vocations days and 'ClubEnt'. Students' preparation for the next stage of education is good although weak numeracy skills hinder some students' understanding of financial issues. Students have a good understanding of different cultures from around the world and the cultural diversity of their local community.

Students' standards of attainment are average. They make satisfactory progress from their starting points because of satisfactory teaching. Standards in mathematics are below average. In Years 7 to 9, boys underachieve. However, in Years 10 and 11 they make satisfactory progress and girls underachieve. This is because work is not demanding enough and teaching is inconsistent. Relationships are good which help to build students' confidence and support their good personal development. Work is marked but comments do not always inform students about how to improve their work. The guidance students get is generally good. However, they do not always know their targets for improvement or how to improve their work.

The curriculum has undergone a significant change for the better. New, innovative courses such as the 'thematic curriculum' for Year 7 students are providing good opportunities for students to make the links between subjects and to improve their standards of attainment.

Senior leaders rigorously monitor the work of the school and set challenging targets for improvement. Their evaluation of the effectiveness of the school is a little too generous. The monitoring role of middle managers is not firmly embedded across the school. Whilst there is very good practice in English, for example, the same rigorous monitoring is not evident for all subjects and leads to inconsistencies within the teaching. Governors support the school well.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Standards of attainment are average and students make satisfactory progress overall. Standards continue to rise under the new leadership of the sixth form. The director of 14 to 19 education provides good leadership and management, creating a supportive environment, which is appreciated by students. Significant improvements have been made to the academic guidance and pastoral support for students, a concern noted by the previous inspection. Students themselves felt that guidance and support had improved through a new team of tutors and the weekly guidance lesson. There are good systems for tackling student underperformance, with underachievement being identified and appropriate action usually taken. However, not all students are clear enough about their targets for improvement or what they need to do to make more progress.

Students' personal development is good. They enjoy school and feel the school is interested in their views and takes account of their suggestions. They display maturity and good behaviour and are involved in the wider life of the school, acting as positive role models and providing a lead to young students in organising Year 7 discos and a range of charity events.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. There are good, supportive relationships. However, in some lessons students do not take enough responsibility for their own learning because activities do not provide them with appropriate opportunities or sufficient challenge.

The widening of course provision through collaborative working with the consortium of other schools has been successful in attracting more students. This has resulted in an increase in the staying on rate. Retention rates are also good and a higher proportion of students are progressing to university education. The performing arts are a strong feature of the curriculum and students gain a good insight into commerce by running their own theatre companies.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of teaching of mathematics in order to raise standards and
- improve student achievement.
- Ensure all students know their targets for improvement and are aware of how to
- improve their work.
- Ensure middle leaders play a greater role in monitoring and evaluating the work of their areas in order to bring about improvements in teaching and learning.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students' standards of attainment on entry to the school are broadly in line with national expectations. In Years 7 to 9, students make satisfactory progress and join Year 10 with broadly average standards. By the time they leave Year 11, students' standards are average in comparison with national expectations and their progress is satisfactory. This is confirmed by the most recent set of examination results and the work seen during the inspection.

During Years 7 to 9, all students make good progress in English and broadly average progress in science. However, boys' progress in mathematics is inadequate because work is not always demanding enough. In Years 10 and 11, overall standards are improving rapidly because of the improved curriculum, better tracking systems and recent improvements in teaching. Standards in mathematics remain below average. However, whilst boys now make satisfactory progress, girls underachieve in this subject. Students make satisfactory progress in the sixth form and attain broadly average standards.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students enjoy their education and speak enthusiastically about the care taken to settle them into the school. Students' perception of spiritual, moral and social issues is mature and they respond in an open-minded way to new ideas from other cultures and art forms. They have a rich experience of performing arts through the specialism of the school. Students feel safe. They say that there are very few incidences of bullying and that any which do occur are investigated and resolved quickly. A small minority of parents expressed concern over behaviour but inspectors found it to be good. There is little disruption to learning or anti-social conduct. Students understand the importance of adopting a healthy lifestyle. They monitor their own health through the school-wide fitness programme. Students enjoy and participate widely in extra-curricular activities. They speak positively of the healthy lunchtime food options. Attendance is slightly below the national average and exacerbated by a local tradition of works' holidays in September. Students make many contributions to the wider community especially in managing arts events. Older students genuinely enjoy helping the younger students. However, there are limited opportunities for students to develop greater leadership skills to enrich life and work in school. Students are well prepared for their future work or study. They develop a good understanding of business and enterprise because of the many opportunities given to them to work in teams.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching is characterised by good relationships, resulting in a purposeful and calm learning environment. Most lessons are well planned with clear and relevant objectives, so that students know the purpose of their work. Teachers offer a good range of appropriate activities for students' learning needs, and students clearly enjoy what they are doing. They are supportive of each other in the classroom, helping others to learn. In a dance lesson, for example, students were able to offer each other constructive advice about how to improve their performance as well as encouragement and praise. Normally, behaviour is managed effectively so that learning is not disrupted. Many teachers are using information and communication technology effectively in lessons to support learning. Students at all levels of ability benefit from some good teaching of English. This has led to substantial improvement in standards in English. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive close and well judged attention from the learning support assistants.

In some lessons, for example in mathematics, students are less involved in their learning and are not encouraged to think for themselves. This leads to slower progress. The marking of students' work varies, and does not always show students how to improve their written work. Whilst teachers are increasingly using detailed assessment information to set targets for improvement, this practice is not fully consistent across the school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum has undergone significant improvement in recent years. It is now tailored creatively to meet students' needs and aptitudes, though the full impact of these changes is still to be seen in external examination results. The curriculum provides varied routes for study for all students. To improve the achievement of younger students, the school has introduced a major innovation in Year 7. This is supporting the transition from a primary to a secondary style of education effectively. It has already had a positive impact on enjoyment and attitudes to learning and there is evidence of improved standards. In Years 8 and 9 there is insufficient focus on improving numeracy skills across all subjects as students do not have enough opportunities to practise key numeracy skills.

In Years 10 and 11, there is a very wide choice of academic options together with vocational subjects. This has enabled more students to gain the equivalent of five or more good GCSE grades.

There is effective support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those needing support with using English. There is very good provision for performing arts. Gifted and talented students are offered many extension and enrichment activities. A wide range of extra-curricular activities is offered to all students and there is a good take up.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school is placing an increasingly high priority on meeting the individual needs of its students and as a result achievement is improving rapidly. There is now better co-ordination to ensure that both students' personal and academic progress is carefully analysed and any underachievement is identified and addressed. However, in some subjects, students are not clear about their targets for improvement or how they can improve their work.

Staff know the students well, in particular those with learning and personal difficulties. Targeted programmes that clearly focus on students' individual needs provide good support. The new Care Centre is a positive development for students at risk from permanent exclusion or those who need to develop their confidence or basic literacy and numeracy skills.

Students have well planned and coordinated support and guidance that enables them to make well informed choices about further study on leaving school and on careers. In 2006, the school gained the Black Country Careers Award. This is an improvement in the sixth form since the last inspection when guidance for further/higher education was judged unsatisfactory.

Health and safety, risk assessment and child protection procedures are securely in place.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Good leadership and management are bringing about rapid improvement in students' standards and achievement. There is a clear sense of direction and purpose. The school's vision makes no secret of striving for excellence in every aspect of school life for all students. The headteacher provides good leadership and inspires staff by pushing intellectual and spiritual development for all within the school community. The headteacher's twice weekly drop-in surgeries enable parents to voice their opinions and make suggestions about how the school can continue to improve. The headteacher is supported by a strong and extensive leadership team. At a senior level, good systems are in place to monitor and evaluate the performance of the school. Weak teaching has been confronted and staffing changes have occurred to secure improved provision. At middle management, monitoring and evaluation are less secure and result in inconsistent practice in teaching and learning. The school's specialist status for performing arts is used well to improve students' personal development and raise standards. Governors are well informed and challenge the school appropriately. The school's financial situation is improving with the budget deficit being significantly reduced.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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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?	3	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	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?	3	3
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?	2	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	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
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	

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

18 November 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Stuart Bathurst Catholic High School College of Performing Arts, Wednesbury,
WS10 9QS

Thank you for making us feel welcome and being so friendly when we came to your school recently to look at the work you do and to talk to your teachers. We enjoyed chatting to you. You told us that you like all the recent changes that have occurred which are helping to improve your school. We particularly liked how the older students help the younger ones and the way you all get on with one another. Your school is satisfactory and improving rapidly.

The standards you attain are broadly average and the progress you make is satisfactory. Standards are improving rapidly and the school's results in 2007 were much better than those of 2006. Whilst most lessons are satisfactory, you do not do as well in mathematics because work is not always demanding enough. There have been many positive improvements to the curriculum, particularly in Year 7.

It is clear that you go to a caring school. You are given good advice on careers and further and higher education. However, you are not always set targets for improving your work or told how you might make better progress. The school helps you to gain confidence in yourselves and you have good attitudes to learning. You behave well and are polite to visitors. You show consideration for others and are friendly and helpful to each other. You show a good awareness of how to stay healthy and enjoy the many sporting activities that are available to you. You have a good knowledge of the culturally diverse communities you live in.

Your headteacher and other senior teachers lead the school well and are ensuring it is improving. There are some good middle leaders but there is a need for some to get better at checking how well you are learning and the progress you are making.

To make the school even better we have asked your teachers to do a number of things. First, to set more demanding work and ensure you make better progress in mathematics. Second, to ensure you all know your targets for improvement, and know how to make even better progress. Third, ensure that all middle leaders have a more consistent approach to checking and improving the areas for which they are responsible.

Thank you again for making us feel so welcome.

David Cox Lead inspector

18 November 2007



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Lead inspector