

St Bernadette Catholic Secondary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109331
Local Authority	Bristol, City of
Inspection number	309963
Inspection dates	8–9 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Grahame Sherfield HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	770
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mary Regan
Headteacher	Basia Mclaughlin
Date of previous school inspection	15 November 2004
School address	Fossedale Avenue Whitchurch Bristol BS14 9LS
Telephone number	01173 772050
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Age group	11-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Bernadette Catholic Secondary School is of below average size and has specialist status for mathematics and computing. It serves pupils from a wide area in the city and the majority come from areas that have socio-economic disadvantages. The proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties, which include both moderate literacy, numeracy, social and emotional problems, is below average. Most pupils are White British and relatively few speak English as an additional language.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Bernadette Catholic Secondary School is a satisfactory and improving school. It is a strong faith and learning community which includes and values all pupils and this is reflected well in its day-to-day life. Most parents are very supportive of the school and value its 'warm, welcoming atmosphere'. One parent said 'My son is very lucky to be part of this school community.'

Standards in Year 9 and Year 11 are currently average and pupils' progress is satisfactory. Teaching and learning, though improving, are satisfactory. There is some good teaching, particularly in English in Years 7 to 9, but sometimes classroom activities do not match the needs of the pupils well enough and the quality of guidance on how they can improve their work is inconsistent. In other respects, care, guidance and support are good and are key features of the school, reflecting the strong ethos of caring for every pupil and developing the whole individual as well as the good links with outside agencies. Consequently, pupils' personal development and well-being are good. They behave well and consider others. They feel they are listened to and they value their good relationships with other pupils and with school staff. Pupils place a high value on the school community and comment on its 'great spirit'. Attendance is outstanding. Pupils make the most of the wide range of opportunities open to them to contribute to their school and to the wider community.

The school has good plans for September 2008 to build on its current Key Stage 4 curriculum to provide more extensive opportunities for vocational qualifications. A substantial number of pupils have chosen the new qualifications, indicating the appropriateness of these developments. The impact of school's specialist status on the quality of education is satisfactory. Teachers' assessments indicate that targets for the specialist subjects, though not met in 2007, are likely to be reached in 2008. Information and communication technology (ICT) equipment is used to support learning in other subjects and to assist the local hospital education service. Specialist mathematics teaching is provided in partner primary schools.

The headteacher, supported by a strong leadership team, effective middle leaders and a good governing body, has a clear view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school that has resulted in a strong emphasis on teachers expecting better progress from pupils and setting more challenging targets. This is already having an impact on achievement and standards, particularly in Year 8 and Year 10, where the school's own data indicate that the current rate of progress is good. Points for improvement from the previous inspection have also been effectively addressed. Consequently, the school's capacity to improve is good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of teaching so that the needs of all pupils are met more effectively.
- Ensure that pupils receive consistently clear guidance on how to improve their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Attainment on entry is average overall, although a minority of pupils need additional help with their reading and writing so that they can make the most of the opportunities provided by the curriculum. In English, good teaching has enabled pupils in Year 9 to make good progress and standards are above average. The school has been working hard and effectively to improve the achievement and standards of pupils currently in Years 7 and 8. In Year 7, pupils are benefiting

from lessons intended to help them understand how best they can make progress in their work and in Year 8 teachers are setting more challenging targets for pupils in mathematics and science, matching those already set to a higher level in English. Assessments indicate that this is increasing the rate of progress that pupils are making and that this is currently good.

In GCSE examinations in the last two years, standards were average and pupils made satisfactory progress. Pupils currently in Year 11 are making progress at a similar rate and standards are average. The school has set higher expectations of the progress that should be made by pupils currently in Year 10. Better leadership is now established in the core subjects and teachers' assessments indicate that these pupils are currently making good progress.

The progress made by pupils with learning difficulties, by higher attaining pupils and by those from a minority ethnic background is similar to the majority of their peers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

There is a calm, courteous atmosphere in the school and pupils show respect to visitors, staff and their peers. They enjoy the school, feel it is a safe place to be and have positive attitudes to learning in most lessons, although this is not always the case when lessons are not challenging enough to engage them fully. Most are confident that staff deal with any bullying incidents effectively. The school employs a wide range of creative strategies to encourage better attendance, which is outstanding and continuing to improve.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Spirituality develops well through the chaplaincy activities in which some pupils engage and understanding of other cultures is fostered through the curriculum and other activities such as the sponsorship of children in India and funding school starter kits in Africa. Pupils make a substantial contribution to charity fundraising for local, national and international causes through their charity week and other events throughout the year. They are thoughtful about others and value 'good friends', their 'supportive staff' and the school community.

Pupils are aware of the need to stay healthy and many are involved in sporting activities in school and the community. Student council members take their responsibilities seriously and they value the way in which they can bring about changes, such as the canopy to provide shelter from the sun and the landscaping of an open area of the school. Pupils' preparation for their future economic well-being is satisfactory because pupils' skills in literacy and numeracy are average.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

In recent years, the school has improved the way in which it monitors and evaluates the quality of teaching and learning, involving more people in the process and sharing expertise more effectively. This is having a positive impact on quality. There is a good atmosphere for learning and the pace of many lessons is brisk and purposeful. Learning objectives are usually clear and shared with the pupils so that they understand the purpose of the activities well. In the best practice, these are referred to throughout the lessons to help the pupils to reflect on their progress. Sometimes the link between activities and the stated intentions of the lessons is not clear, adversely affecting the pace of pupils' work and their engagement.

Marking is regular with some instances of very good practice, for example in art, where there is frequent reference to what has been achieved and specific advice for pupils about how to improve their work. However, the quality of marking is not consistent across the school. The school's systems for tracking pupils' progress and identifying those who would benefit from extra support are rigorous and accurate. This information is used well to provide extra help outside lessons, and this has a positive impact on pupils' progress. It is not being used consistently in lesson planning, and as a result activities tend to be targeted at the middle ability pupils, sometimes with insufficient challenge for the more able and without clear support for those who require it.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Pupils receive high quality advice and guidance on the next stage in their education and their future career choices. They value the ways in which this is taught through drama and involving a range of speakers. All pupils in Key Stage 4 study for a qualification in ICT and this makes an important contribution to developing skills likely to be useful to them at college and beyond. Good links with partner primary schools and with the local Catholic sixth form college help to provide a smooth transition as pupils join and leave the school.

A wide range of extra-curricular opportunities is available at lunchtime and after school and these are well attended. Pupils value the high quality extra support for learning given to them by their teachers. Trips, activities and charity fund-raising events also enrich their experience of school and community life. Pupils have opportunities to take on responsibilities, such as sports leadership with primary schools, the prefect system and the buddying reading scheme. The school has a good enrichment programme for its gifted and talented students through links with external partners but there are few activities in lessons to stretch and challenge them.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

As one parent correctly identifies, 'St Bernadette offers a safe environment for children to gain confidence, learn and develop.' There is good provision for vulnerable pupils and those who need additional help with basic literacy and numeracy. In recent years, the school has introduced more coherent systems for linking the provision for the personal and the academic care of the pupils. This is having a good impact on their care and support, ensuring that early intervention helps them to consider the consequences of their actions for themselves and others. The pupils' knowledge of their targets is inconsistent and they do not always have a clear idea about how to improve their work. Nevertheless, the pupils generally meet their targets and the school is increasing the level of challenge as part of its strategy to raise achievement.

Requirements for safeguarding and child protection are fully in place, managed well and reviewed regularly. Those pupils who benefit from alternative provision away from the school site remain cared for and supported by school staff. They are helped by the strong partnerships that the school has established with a range of other agencies.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher provides good leadership and a clear direction for the future development of the school. She is supported well by a strong senior leadership team and by a governing body that provides good challenge and support.

Senior leaders and governors have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, based on well established and effective systems for monitoring and evaluating the work of both faculties and year teams. Middle leaders play a key role in carrying out this work in their area of responsibility in partnership with the senior leadership team, although the quality of subject leadership is not yet consistently good. Pupils' views of provision are systematically sought and are an integral part of evaluating provision. The school development plan provides clear strategic direction. It sets out an appropriate medium-term agenda for the improvement of the school with more detailed plans for the current year that are used well by senior staff to check progress systematically.

The school works well with external agencies to extend the opportunities for pupils both academically and in their personal development. Good examples of these are the effective partnerships with the Roman Catholic diocese and with higher education.

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Annex A

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?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
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.

Annex A

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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	3
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

12 May 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Bernadette Catholic Secondary School, Bristol, BS14 9LS

On behalf of the inspection team, I wish to thank you for your involvement in the recent inspection of your school, particularly for the friendly and open way in which you talked to the inspectors in discussions, in lessons and around the school. We were also pleased to have responses from so many of your parents.

We judged your school to be satisfactory and improving. We found some important strengths, including:

- The school is a strong and caring community.
- You have good opportunities for personal development and many of you take on responsibilities in the day-to-day operation of the school as well as contributing to the wider community.
- The headteacher and her staff are working effectively to help you to develop as people as well as do well in your tests and examinations.

We have asked the school to improve two aspects:

- Some lessons build on the understanding you already have but other lessons do not take full account of what you already know. Work needs to be always set at the right level of challenge for all ability groups, and you can help by rising to that challenge.
- The guidance you receive on how to improve your work is not consistently clear, and it needs to be to ensure that you can make good progress.

Thank you again for your help during the inspection and we wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Grahame Sherfield Her Majesty's Inspector