

St Bede's Inter-Church Comprehensive School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110887
Local Authority	CAMBRIDGESHIRE LA
Inspection number	310453
Inspection date	15 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Tony Beaver

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	740
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Claire Downham
Headteacher	Dr Jan Hunt
Date of previous school inspection	27 September 2004
School address	Birdwood Road Cambridge Cambridgeshire CB1 3TB
Telephone number	01223 568816
Fax number	01223 576482

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector who was in school for one day. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following areas: achievement and standards, students' personal development and well-being, leadership and management, and the school's specialist status in the humanities. Some aspects of teaching and learning, the curriculum, care, guidance and support and the school's inter-church status were also inspected. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation form, the latest information available on its performance in national tests and examinations, school minutes and other documentation, discussions with students, staff and a governor, observations of lessons and students' work, and parental responses to a questionnaire.

Some aspects of the school's work were not inspected in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to indicate that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation form, were not justified. These are included, where appropriate, in the report.

Description of the school

St Bede's is a joint Anglican and Roman Catholic church school. Applicants who attend either of the two churches have precedence. Students with other faiths are admitted if there are places. The school is smaller than most secondary schools and students come from many primary schools in the area. It is very popular and has increased the number of classes in each year from four to five, in response to the demand for places. Students come from a wide range of backgrounds, but many have more advantaged socio-economic circumstances than average. Fewer than usual claim entitlement to free school meals. The percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average, but above-average numbers have statements of special educational need. The numbers of students from minority ethnic groups is in line with the national average, and 35 are at an early stage in learning English.

The school has a specialism in humanities. It holds awards for: Investors in People, Young Enterprise, Healthy Schools, Eco-schools, and a British Council International School award. In 2006, it was recognised by the Department for Education and Skills as one of the 200 most improved schools in England.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with outstanding features. Its mission is to be a 'learning, caring and serving community' within the Christian church. It fulfils its mission very well. Its specialist humanities status is a focus in the life of the school and considerably influences the standards achieved and the quality of education that students receive.

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong. Some students say the school gives them time to reflect and achieve a sense of inner peace and well-being. Students also say how very much they enjoy school life. Consequently, attendance is above average, behaviour excellent and exclusions are minimal. Students have a clear understanding of how to stay healthy and safe. They ensure their independence as economically self-sufficient citizens by achieving essential qualifications to advance their further education and career ambitions. The vast majority of students opt to continue their education after age 16, and many proceed to higher education in due course. They make an excellent contribution to the community. They see the school itself as a 'caring and serving' community. The school senate works hard on behalf of all students, staff and parents to ensure that needs are recognised. Student-led charitable fund-raising for local and national communities is impressive. Students' understanding that the community has an international dimension is apparent in strong links with a partner school in Uganda. Specialist humanities status strongly supports personal development and a sense of community, as in an 'Africa Day' for primary school pupils. Inter-church status adds to the strength of community links across parishes and dioceses.

The quality of education that students receive is good. Teaching and learning are good, with examples of outstanding practice. Teachers are very committed to students and work hard to enable all to achieve well. Teachers know their subjects well, and use their knowledge to interest students. Lessons often enthuse students to learn. Relationships are excellent. Consequently, students have the confidence to ask questions and respond to challenging questions from teachers, while others listen attentively and learn from the exchanges. Lessons are usually well planned, and learning objectives are conveyed clearly to students at the beginning of lessons. Teaching assistants are very well deployed in lessons. They give strong support to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. However, in some cases, teachers do not use the information available on students' prior attainment well enough to adapt work to meet the full range of learners' needs. Occasionally, teachers talk too long and prevent students from learning more for themselves.

A good curriculum gives students a good range of choice to meet their varied needs and to enjoy learning as they move up the school. The curriculum is well adapted to the needs of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and good support enables all to access the learning opportunities available. The most able also receive a range of additional learning opportunities both in and out of lessons, such as local-history research and podcasts with a school in Helsinki. An AS-level course is available, and some students are successfully fast-tracked to GCSE in a modern language by Year 9. Opportunities for students to learn outside the curriculum, through enrichment and extra-curricular activities, are good. The school's specialist status in the humanities influences the curriculum well beyond the three named humanity subjects themselves, history, geography and religious studies. For example, the range of Key Stage 4 courses now includes business, leisure and tourism. A citizenship programme is also an initiative of the humanities, and gives all students an understanding of the responsibilities exercised by a good

citizen. The subject is studied by all to GCSE. Special projects link the humanity subjects to others - for example to art, English and science - and students have gained new perspectives from these innovations. Humanities' days involve students working in mixed-aged groups on special topics, and learning in a new context supports personal development well.

The school's sense of mission as a 'serving' community underlies the impressive quality of pastoral care for individual students. Tutors and all staff know their students well in this smaller than average school, and students say they feel very confident to seek help and advice from staff. Personal, social and health education covers all essentials, such as healthy lifestyles and sexual health, within a moral context of respect and care for others. Students say how much they appreciate the chaplain's help and advice, which they seek freely.

Support to enable students to achieve well in their academic work is good and improving further. In general, marking gives helpful advice on how to improve particular pieces of work. Classes are held at weekends to enable students to complete coursework. A homework club gives students support in their work after school. In a revised system developed this term, the school is using data describing students' previous performance in order to set challenging academic targets to stretch them and improve achievement. Reviews with tutors are scheduled. However, not all students are fully aware of their targets and there is no requirement to consult teachers to find what needs to be done in each subject to achieve the best grade possible. Some students do take the initiative and make their own contact with teachers.

Students' strong sense of purpose and the good quality of education provided ensure that girls and boys of all abilities, and from varied social and ethnic backgrounds, learn successfully and achieve well. Overall, students enter with average attainment, and make good progress throughout the school. Consequently, standards are consistently above average in the Year 9 national tests and in GCSE examinations. In 2007, over two in every three students gained five or more GCSE subjects at grades A* to C. Every student regularly gains five graded GCSE subjects. Students with high potential achieve well, and the percentage of GCSE A* and A grades gained was above average in 2007. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well throughout the school, as do those who are at an early stage in learning English. There is variation in subject performance; achievement in information and communication technology (ICT), religious studies and resistant materials is not as good as in other subjects.

Leadership and management are good overall. The headteacher's leadership is excellent. Her clarity of vision and determination are very effective in ensuring improvement. Consequently, all share the school's mission of 'learning, caring and serving'. The school is highly inclusive. A few students who have failed elsewhere succeed in this school. Senior colleagues and governors give very strong support. Governors monitor the quality of education for themselves and have a strategic view of developments from which to challenge management if necessary. The contribution of middle subject leaders is more varied in ensuring their subjects are effective, but is good overall.

Management is effective. Rigorous monitoring of teaching and students' work ensures good standards and quality of education. Underperformance is not accepted. Targets are challenging and academic performance is expected to match that of the top 25% of similar schools - and it consistently does so overall. Specialist school academic targets for the three humanity subjects are challenging and are regularly exceeded in geography and history, but not in religious studies. Income is modest, but resources are deployed very well to give very good value for money. The accommodation has improved since the last inspection and an impressive sports hall, much

appreciated by students, is used well by school and community. There is approval for further substantial improvements next year.

Self-evaluation is accurate and perceptive. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. For example, the school's specialism has ensured that citizenship has become a strength, and teaching assistants are now effective, as shown by the good achievement of students with learning difficulties. The school has the endorsement and support of the vast majority of parents. Given the consistent rate of improvement since 2004, the school has good capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement in ICT, resistant materials and religious studies so that students achieve as well in these as in their other subjects, and reach the specialist school academic target set in religious studies.
- Maximise the effectiveness of target-setting for individual students by involving subject teachers more fully in providing specific advice to students on how to improve.

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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?	2
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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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	1

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.

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	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
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	1
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

16 November 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of St Bede's Inter-Church Comprehensive School, Cambridge CB1 3TB

Thank you very much for your friendliness, courtesy and help during my recent visit to your school. This letter gives you the result of the inspection.

Your school gives you a good education and has some outstanding features. You and your teachers work together well so that you learn successfully. You are well taught and some teaching is excellent. The school's humanities specialism helps you to make links with other subjects, and the development of citizenship has added to the good curriculum available. Those of you I had the opportunity to speak to felt safe and very well cared for. There are always staff available to speak to if problems arise. You are getting more precise academic targets to help you know at what level you are achieving. It would help you achieve even better if you spoke to each subject teacher about how to improve your work in that subject before you have your tutor review.

The vast majority of you make good progress and achieve well. Results of the Year 9 national tests and of GCSE examinations are regularly above the national average. In 2007, over two in every three students gained five or more GCSE A* to C grades. A good percentage of A* and A grades was achieved. Everyone gained at least five GCSE grades. However, results in ICT, religious studies and resistant materials should be better and I have asked the school to help you do as well in these as in your other subjects.

I was particularly impressed with you, the students. You behave very well in lessons and want to learn. You also behave very responsibly when there is no member of staff closely supervising you. Your school's mission is to be a place of 'learning, caring and serving' and you carry this out in what you do. Your initiatives to raise funds to support worthwhile causes at home and abroad are admirable. Some of you feel your Inter-Church school helps you to reflect on what is important in your life and brings you an inner peace and sense of well-being.

Your school would not work so well without the strong leadership of the headteacher and support of the staff. They are determined that you will achieve your best at St Bede's, and if you continue to put in the effort needed, you will!

Yours sincerely

Dr Tony Beaver

Lead inspector