

Bishop Walsh Catholic School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103536
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	323855
Inspection dates	14–15 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Usha Devi HMI

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 (total)	765
Sixth form	228
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Cousins
Headteacher	John Farrell
Date of previous school inspection	22 February 2006
School address	Wylde Green Road Sutton Coldfield B76 1QT
Telephone number	01213 513215
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Age group	11–18
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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

Bishop Walsh Catholic School is an average size school situated in a residential area in Sutton Coldfield. The local authority has recognised it as a high performing specialist school with specialist status for performing arts and a second specialism in mathematics and computing. The proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals, those whose first language is not English and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are below the national averages. Three quarters of the pupils are White British and the remainder are from different ethnic groups, including White Irish. The school has received the Sportsmark and Arts Mark Gold Award in recognition of its work.

The governors appointed a new headteacher in September 2008. The headteacher and governors are in the process of reviewing roles and responsibilities in the school. Since September 2008 there have been a number of new appointments. These include an acting deputy headteacher and acting assistant headteacher. New permanent heads of department have been appointed in English, and design and technology. Acting heads of department have been appointed in information and communication technology (ICT), history and business studies.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Bishop Walsh Catholic School is a good school with outstanding features within pupils' personal development and the curriculum. The school's Catholic ethos underpins this harmonious community where pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The school is well led and managed. The headteacher provides a clear vision for the school and ensures pupils are well cared for. With effective support from senior staff, he ensures the school values personal development and academic success equally. This is reflected in the overwhelming majority of parents who responded to the questionnaire saying they were highly supportive of the school's work. One parent, summing up the views of many, wrote, 'We always feel welcome in school and the school has a real family atmosphere which we very much feel part of.' The school has a good capacity to improve further.

As a result of good guidance and teaching, pupils, including the more able, make good progress to reach high standards when they leave at the end of Year 11. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make outstanding progress because of the very effective support they receive. Unvalidated results in the GCSE examinations show a decrease in the proportion of pupils gaining five A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, from the previous years. This was partly due to variability of the cohort but also due to changes in staffing and the resulting inconsistencies in teaching practice. In response to this, the school leadership team has taken effective action. Improvements to tracking pupils' progress and targeted academic and pastoral support for groups of pupils are already having a positive impact. The school's own monitoring data indicate that the majority of pupils currently in Year 11 are set to make good progress and meet their challenging targets in 2009. Current pupils achieve well in lessons because of the good teaching they receive and their good attitudes towards learning.

Senior leaders and middle leaders regularly monitor and evaluate the progress made by pupils. In some departments, such as mathematics, physical education, religious education and geography, self-evaluation is rigorously undertaken, accurate and presented in a way that key findings can be quickly and easily accessed. This leads to the identification of suitable areas for development and appropriate interventions to improve departmental performance. The headteacher is aware that this good practice is not yet widespread and is leading to some inconsistencies in teaching and pupil performance.

Teaching is good and sometimes outstanding. Pupils make good progress when they are expected to share their learning with others and find out answers for themselves. In the best lessons teachers use a good range of teaching strategies which meet the learning needs and fit the learning styles of the pupils. However, these features are not evident in all lessons and subjects. Sometimes work is not well matched to meet the needs of all pupils and the pace of learning slows. In lessons, there are sometimes limited occasions for pupils to develop responsibility for their learning because they are not always given the opportunity to evaluate the quality of their own or each other's work and identify what they need to do to improve.

The provision for extra-curricular activities is outstanding and greatly supports pupils' excellent understanding of how to stay healthy. Specialist status in performing arts also makes a significant contribution to the good curriculum by providing exciting learning opportunities. For instance, during the annual visit to Venice, pupils perform dance and music items at unique venues. Specialist status in mathematics and computing has enabled the school to extend ICT resources

within the school. All staff are becoming increasingly confident in making effective use of ICT to enhance learning.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. Effective use of assessment data by leaders and staff and the sharing of good practice have resulted in students being set challenging targets and faster rates of progress. Previous results were slightly above average and overall achievement was satisfactory. The school has taken quick action to address student progress in the few underperforming subjects. As a consequence, current students make good progress, although progress varies across subjects, and achievement is good. Teaching and learning are good. Students are well motivated and enjoy their studies. They are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning and develop effective independent learning skills. Sixth form students' personal development is good. A particularly notable feature is their effective leadership of performing arts productions and school sports events. Sixth form mentors effectively support younger students with their studies. Students engage in a wide variety of fund raising events including the annual Lenten charities. The sixth form offers a broad range of AS and A-level courses. The recent addition of a number of vocational courses meets the needs of an increasingly wide range of students. As a result of good guidance to students at the end of Year 11, students, including those who go to other institutions, enroll for appropriate courses. Many Year 13 students progress to university, with a few continuing their studies in further education. Joint post-16 provision with other institutions enriches students' experiences, preparing them well for the future. The new sixth form centre is valued by students and supported well by the learning mentor. The sixth form provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Build on existing good practice and ensure that all staff provide work in lessons that is consistently well matched to the differing learning needs of all pupils.
- Develop pupils' ability to play a greater role in extending their own learning during lessons through opportunities to evaluate the quality of their own or each other's work and identify what they need to do to improve.
- Establish a more consistently rigorous approach to monitoring and evaluating what pupils achieve, and in a form that can be quickly and easily accessed, so that pupils' achievement is consistently good in all departments.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Most pupils start at Bishop Walsh with attainment that is above average. Some join the school with standards that are well above those found nationally. They make good progress, especially in communications media, English literature, English language, history, religious education and mathematics. Consequently, standards are well above national averages by the time they leave. There was a drop in standards in 2008 because of previous staffing issues, and a small numbers of boys, who, despite considerable efforts by the school, missed out on gaining five A* to C grades. Key Stage 3 standards are also well above average. In 2008 there were improvements, particularly at the higher levels (6 and 7), in English and mathematics. In both subjects, targets for 2008 were exceeded at the upper levels, although English did not quite meet its target for

students achieving Level 5 or better. Inspection evidence confirms that the school is on track to continue to attain standards that are well above average.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils much enjoy school and this is reflected in consistently good attendance. They know how to stay safe and behave well in lessons and around school. The specialist performing arts provision plays a good part in developing students' confidence and self-esteem through participation in community activities. About a quarter of all pupils take part in at least one public performance each year. Pupils are well prepared for their future through work-related learning. The school has secure plans in place to further extend pupils' knowledge of personal finance. Through the work of the school council and a wide range of fund-raising events, pupils make a good contribution to the work of the school and the wider community. For example, members of the school council have been effective in bringing improvements to the school environment, they have influenced the variety and balance of food offered at lunchtime and recently organised a family cycle day in Sutton Park. Pupils develop an outstanding understanding of healthy lifestyles through a variety of extra-curricular and sporting activities. Pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is excellent. As a result of programmes such as the cross-school archdiocesan 'All that I am' programme, pupils investigate a broad range of moral issues such as family relationships and drug abuse, and learn to think of others and show compassion.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers' good planning and subject knowledge lead to the delivery of focused lessons where pace and challenge, aided by effective questioning, afford pupils the opportunity to make good and sometimes outstanding progress. In many lessons, tasks take good account of pupils' different learning styles and teachers make effective use of interactive ICT resources to enhance learning. Classroom relationships are positive; as one pupil said, 'Teachers bend over backwards to do their best for us.' This best practice is not yet fully shared across all departments. Learners are not always proactive in asking questions and taking the initiative to move forward their learning in order to become more independent learners. On occasions, activities in lessons do not fully meet the needs of all learners and this leads to satisfactory rather than good progress. The needs of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are particularly well met through the use of well-trained teaching assistants. Specialist status in the performing arts has enhanced pupils' speaking and listening skills and contributes effectively to learning throughout the school. Teachers' setting of homework and marking of pupils' work is inconsistent. Marking is most effective when teachers provide the necessary information to take learning forward and ensure pupils correct errors.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Bishop Walsh School is developing a modern approach to curriculum development by giving pupils the opportunity to make additional enrichment choices. A good example of this is the License to Cook module observed in Year 8. At Key Stage 3 a great deal of thought has recently

been placed on establishing smaller teaching groups in order to better support middle to less able pupils, particularly in mathematics and science. At Key Stage 4 the curriculum has an academic bias although the vocational provision for the students is under the process of further development. Staff are increasingly supporting links between subjects. For instance during theme weeks, pupils consider aspects of Polish, African or Caribbean culture. ICT is successfully delivered through a combination of discrete lessons in Year 7 and through subjects at Key Stage 3. Following success with a religious education pilot, the school has embarked on a programme to fast track the more able students in Year 9 to start GCSE courses early, and then follow a wider range of GCSE and AS level courses in Year 11. Personal, social and health education is taught as a rolling programme, in line with the interests of parents and the community, and is well supported by outside speakers. An outstanding range of extra-curricular activities, such as robotics, sports activities, study support, performing arts and visits abroad, enables pupils to develop a range of skills needed for life. Provision for gifted and talented pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school successfully enables pupils to feel safe and secure. It takes every opportunity to reinforce pupils' own contribution to the ethos, for example through assemblies which link pupil welfare to the school mission statement to be 'a secure and happy school' where the community 'respect and care for others and ourselves'. Child protection procedures and government safeguarding requirements are in place. Procedures for ensuring safety on trips are secure. Pupils who are vulnerable or at risk are identified early and consequently their needs are met well. The school takes justifiable pride in the learning base provided for this group during lunch hours and breaks, including the help provided for recent arrivals in the course of acquiring better English. Additional support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, delivered in conjunction with external agencies and regular contact with parents, is outstanding. Effective strategies ensure continuity of education and maximise the amount of time that potentially disaffected pupils spend in school. For instance, well planned careers guidance keeps students in education and ensures progress to university or college for a large number. Individual students' performance is regularly tracked and analysed by departments, and interventions and mentoring, where possible, are put in place. The school is aware that the whole-school system for monitoring the progress of pupils towards their targets could be further refined to ensure greater consistency between departments and to increase the involvement pupils have in monitoring progress towards their targets.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher and senior teachers know their school well. Together with middle leaders, staff and governors they are committed to raising standards and achievement and improving the life chances of all pupils. The newly appointed headteacher has reviewed the roles and responsibilities of staff. In particular, he has looked at ways of empowering senior teachers and middle leaders and developing their ability to lead on improvements across the school. As a consequence, there is a good understanding amongst staff that they are accountable for the well-being and success of individual pupils. Coaching and mentoring arrangements make a good contribution towards helping staff to improve and develop their practice. Self-evaluation

is satisfactory. Within departments, the quality of monitoring and evaluation is variable. In some cases, the quality of evaluation by middle leaders is not as rigorous as it should be. Consequently, some staff do not have a secure understanding of how to improve departmental performance. Nevertheless, the school leadership team has demonstrated the capacity to improve the school quickly. For example, improvements to tracking and support designed to improve progress in Key Stage 4 have had a clear impact on standards in the current Year 11. Governors play an important part in the development of the school. They are knowledgeable about the school and provide staff with a good level of challenge and support. The school's promotion of community cohesion is good. Pupils develop a good understanding of cultural differences through visits abroad, the curriculum and visitors to the school.

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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	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?	2	2
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?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1	

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	2
The attendance of learners	2	2
The behaviour of learners	2	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2	2
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

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	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

16 January 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Bishop Walsh Catholic School, Sutton Coldfield, B76 1QT

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed meeting with you, visiting your lessons and looking at your work. We would like to say a special thank you to the pupils on the school council and the group of students from the sixth form who came to talk to us. You told us how much you value the support of the adults that work with you, and your parents agreed. Thank you also to the School Liturgy Band for their CD. We were impressed with your music.

We decided that Bishop Walsh is a good school with some aspects that are outstanding. Here is what we found.

- You reach standards that are well above the national average and make good progress, particularly in communications media, English literature, English language, history, religious education and mathematics. The quality of education in the sixth form has recently improved and you now make good progress.
- Your behaviour in lessons and around school is good and you clearly get on well with each other.
- Mr Farrell, together with the staff and governors, works hard to ensure you enjoy school and have a good education, and the school provides an outstanding range of extra-curricular activities, particularly in performing arts and sports.
- Your school and sixth form use the performing arts, and mathematics and computing specialism well. These have led to the greater use of ICT and opportunities to perform abroad, for instance during the trip to Venice.

There are three things we have asked Mr Farrell, the staff and governors to focus on so that your school and sixth form can be even better in the future. We have asked all the teachers to ensure that work in all lessons matches your different learning needs. We have also asked teachers to give you more opportunities to evaluate the quality of your own or each other's work and identify what you need to do to improve. Finally, we have asked the senior teachers and heads of departments to make sure you achieve your very best in all subjects. You can help by ensuring that you maintain your good behaviour and by continuing to work hard in all lessons. You can of course contribute to the school's continuing improvement by sharing your views through the school council.

Thank you again for being so helpful and for making our inspection so enjoyable and rewarding. It was a pleasure to meet you. We wish you the very best for the future.

Usha Devi

Her Majesty's Inspector