

Bury Church of England High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105365
Local Authority	Bury
Inspection number	324211
Inspection dates	24–25 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Vincent Ashworth 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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	782
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr J Allen
Headteacher	Mr Philip Grady
Date of previous school inspection	24 May 2006
School address	Haslam Brow Bury Lancashire BL9 0TS
Telephone number	0161 7976236
Fax number	0161 7051872

Age group	11–16
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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

Bury Church of England High School is a smaller than average sized school. Demand for places is high. Most pupils are of White British heritage and there are slightly more girls than boys. There are only a few pupils for whom English is not their first language. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is much lower than average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also lower than average, although there is a higher than average proportion with a statement of special educational needs. A small number of pupils are looked after. The school has been a specialist humanities college since 2005 and has achieved the Geographical Association's Secondary Geography Quality Mark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Bury Church of England High School is a good school with some outstanding features. The school is very popular and is highly regarded in the communities it serves. With very few exceptions, parents are strongly supportive of the school and value highly the education it provides. Pupils have a strong sense of pride in their school and develop as confident and articulate individuals who contribute in a positive way to the wider community. They acquire a strong spiritual awareness and demonstrate high levels of respect for both adults and fellow students. Pupils achieve well because teaching is good and their progress is monitored very carefully.

Positive and good-humoured relationships between staff and pupils create a purposeful and highly supportive ambience for learning. Pupils respond well to the good teaching they receive. In many instances, teaching is outstanding and this sparks pupils' creativity and imagination. However, this is not consistently the case as not all teachers ensure that pupils' needs are systematically planned for and met in lessons.

The headteacher provides strong direction and is well supported by staff and governors. Heads of department are relentless in striving for excellence. Staff relationships are good and the whole school shares a common purpose focused on raising standards. Governors have good links with the school and are supportive of everything it tries to do.

The school's capacity to improve is good. Standards have risen since the previous inspection and the school has made improvements in the areas identified for action. Results in national tests and GCSE examinations taken by the current Year 11 show that recent steps taken to raise pupils' achievement have been successful. Results in GCSE religious education have increased dramatically. Pupils' achievement in English has also improved and previous staffing problems in this area have been stabilised. Systems for tracking pupils' progress are now well embedded and the academic guidance they receive is excellent. Pupils' personal development is first class, as is the quality of care, guidance and support they receive. The school is aware that some subjects, particularly modern foreign languages, do not perform as well as others and that pupils' achievement in these subjects is not as good as it could be. The school is taking decisive steps to bring about improvements in these areas.

The school's specialist status in humanities is being used very well to underpin improvement and innovation in the school. The entrepreneurial and ambitious management of this aspect of the school's work has had a very positive impact on the quality of teaching and the enrichment of pupils' learning. Challenging targets in humanities subjects are nearly always met and often exceeded.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise pupils' achievement further, especially in modern foreign languages.
- Further improve teaching and learning to ensure that all lessons meet the full range of individual needs.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards on entry are above the national average, pupils make good progress as they move through the school and they leave having reached standards that are well above the national average.

In recent years, pupils have generally made steady progress by the end of Year 9. The provisional Key Stage 3 results for 2008 show that now considerably more pupils attain the very highest levels they are capable of in core subjects. Results at GCSE level have improved considerably since the time of the last inspection. In 2008, the proportion of pupils attaining five or more grades A* to C including English and mathematics was, at 74%, the highest recorded by the school and well above the national average. There were some outstanding results in the specialist subjects of geography and religious studies. Results for French and German were poor, although this is in the context of a much higher proportion of entries than seen in most schools. No pupil left the school without at least one GCSE pass.

There is no significant difference between the achievement of boys and that of girls. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make very good progress because of the outstanding support and care they receive. The school has recognised that for a small number of high ability pupils, the proportion of A and A* grades could be increased.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' spiritual moral and social development is excellent and firmly based on the school's strong spiritual values. Attendance is very high and reflects pupils' appreciation and enjoyment of life in school. Pupils demonstrate good, mature and cooperative behaviour in class and around the building. They benefit from a welcoming, supportive atmosphere where bullying is rare, effectively dealt with and issues such as healthy living and care for others are of paramount importance. Pupils feel safe around the school, and appreciate the emphasis on encouragement and recognition of effort. Pupils' participation in class is characterised by spirited discussion and diligent independent work. Pupils welcome the many chances they are offered to express their views about school. Their willingness to take on extra responsibility is impressive. Many pupils make valuable contributions to the school community. They confidently share concerns with their teachers, take an active part in the development and day-to-day running of the school and act as mentors to those needing their help. Through their regular involvement in a wide range of extra-curricular activities and school clubs they develop as well-rounded individuals. A vigorous programme of vocational education and specialist days ensure pupils acquire the entrepreneurial and cooperative skills they will require in the workplace.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. In successful lessons pupils make significant progress as a result of the very positive and trusting relationships they have with their teachers. Lessons are well planned and good questioning stretches and challenges. Learning objectives are clear and pupils' understanding of assessment criteria enables them to evaluate their own work and that of their peers. Pupils are engaged in a range of tasks and have the opportunity

to think for themselves. For example, in a Year 9 religious education lesson, excellent learning resources stimulated outstanding responses to the issues raised on prisoners of conscience. A Year 7 cross-curricular lesson showed excellent integration of English, dance, music and exercise, with Year 11 dance pupils making an excellent contribution in helping the younger pupils to refine their choreography and evaluate their learning. In less effective lessons, teaching does not meet the needs of all pupils. Learning objectives are less precise; there is too much teacher input and too little pupil involvement. Consequently, pupils become distracted and low level chatter increases.

The quality of day-to-day marking is variable within and between departments, though good use is made of evaluation sheets completed by the pupils, their teachers and their parents. Coursework and exam work is well marked and pupils say they know what they are doing well and what they need to do to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding and contributes significantly to pupils' personal development. The school is embedding the new Key Stage 3 curriculum very well and has created excellent opportunities for cross-curricular working. The curriculum is further enriched with drama in Year 7 and the opportunity to study a second language in Years 8 and 9. At Key Stage 4 there is an excellent range of academic and vocational GCSE courses. Partnerships with other providers have extended the number of vocational programmes on offer. Personalised programmes including work-placements are also organised for individual pupils. Pupils welcome the opportunity to be entered early for GCSE in French, religious education and English.

A variety of enrichment modules including photography and critical thinking are offered to Year 11 to broaden their experience and enhance enjoyment. More able pupils have excellent opportunities for extension through collaborative programmes with other establishments. There is a wide variety of extra-curricular activities on offer including a range of music and sporting opportunities. These are well supported and appreciated by the pupils. The school's specialist status has enriched the curriculum further. Innovative work with a local museum has led to the production of teaching resources on the history of the cotton trade.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The outstanding care, guidance and support provided to pupils reflect the school's strongly inclusive ethos. Through careful assessment and record keeping, combined with frequent reviews, teachers acquire thoroughly evidenced knowledge of pupils' needs as well as an accurate picture of their potential. Procedures for setting challenging targets and tracking pupils' progress are very well developed and contribute significantly to pupils' academic progress.

Staff identify and respond to the needs of vulnerable pupils, giving strong support to them and their families. Thoughtful induction processes help new pupils to settle in. At appropriate times, pupils get effective advice about courses and career paths they might choose. The few pupils at risk of disaffection receive well-tailored support and guidance, which keep them engaged. The expertise of many external agencies is used to beneficial effect. Policies and procedures for health, safety and child protection are subject to regular review and are familiar to all staff.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher and governors provide a vision for the school which is clearly focused on equipping pupils with the skills and aspiration to succeed in adult life. Collaborative working and the partnerships established through the school's specialist status has impacted significantly on the quality and breadth of pupils' learning. The headteacher is ably supported by a highly committed and impressive team of senior and middle managers. The quality of middle leadership is particularly strong; this has had a significant impact on improving the quality of pupils' learning and their achievements.

The process of self-evaluation involves managers at all levels and results in an accurate picture of the school's key strengths and weaknesses. Staff are well informed about school priorities. Managers are aware that more work needs to be done to raise standards and achievement in a very small number of subjects. The need to raise achievement of higher ability pupils has been given a high priority in departmental development plans. Challenging targets are set and many, but not all are met.

Governance is strong. The school benefits from the wealth of expertise and business acumen that governors bring with them. Senior staff are trained in child protection matters and safeguarding is given a high priority. The school's focus on developing pupils' awareness of diversity, their understanding of different communities and their sensitivity to the needs of others, all underpin the good contribution to community cohesion. However, the school has not systematically evaluated the impact of its equalities policies on pupils, staff and parents. Resources and finances are managed astutely and efficiently. Some accommodation is too small for the large class sizes; this, occasionally, has a negative impact on the quality of teaching and learning.

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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/or disabilities make progress	2

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?	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
The extent to which 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	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 learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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 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
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**

Inspection of Bury Church of England High School, Bury, BL9 0TS

Thank you very much for making the inspectors feel so welcome when we visited your school. We particularly enjoyed talking to you and hearing about the good things you had to say about your experiences at school. We also looked at the results of questionnaires sent in by your parents; the vast majority were extremely positive about the school.

We agreed with all that you had to say; yours is a good school and some aspects of what it does are outstanding. We found that you make good progress and get good results in examinations in most subjects. Those of you who need extra help with your learning make very good progress. You do particularly well in humanities subjects, biology, physical education and English literature. We noticed that more of you are now getting higher levels and top grades in English language and mathematics. Results in a few subjects are not quite as good as they should be. We have asked the school to look at ways of getting even better results and ensuring you all do as well as possible in all the subjects you study.

Your behaviour in lessons and around the school is usually good and the vast majority of you show a very mature attitude to learning. The school looks after you extremely well; you told us there is very little bullying and any incidents are usually tackled effectively. The thing that impressed the most was how well you develop as responsible, caring and confident individuals. This is because the school does so well in nurturing your talents and gifts.

The school offers you an excellent choice of courses and extra-curricular activities which really enrich the quality of your learning. We saw some really sparkling lessons which captured your imagination and creativity; others were less interesting which resulted in you not paying attention. We have asked the school to look at ways to improve lessons even more so everyone can get fully involved and learn well.

Keep up the good work and all best wishes for your future success.