

St Bernard's Catholic Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110084
Local Authority	Slough
Inspection number	325097
Inspection date	10 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Anne Wellham HMI

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	884
Sixth form	251
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Howard McBrien
Headteacher	Mr John McAteer
Date of previous school inspection	23 November 2005
School address	1 Langley Road Slough SL3 7AF
Telephone number	01753 527020
Fax number	01753 576919

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Introduction

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector carried out the inspection. The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement in the sixth form, the quality of teaching and learning, and the use of data analysis and self-evaluation to drive improvement.

The inspectors gathered evidence from an analysis of data about students' achievements provided by the school, observation of parts of lessons, parents' questionnaires, and discussions with senior staff, subject leaders, the Chair of Governors and students. The inspectors did not investigate other aspects of the school's work in detail, but found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified. These judgements have been included, where appropriate, in this report.

Description of the school

St Bernard's students are predominantly from a White British background, while approximately 40% of them come from other, mainly white, ethnic backgrounds. A small proportion of students, much lower than the national average, have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. About half of these have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and others have specific learning difficulties or physical impairments. The school is part of a loose federation with two other local secondary schools and was granted humanities specialist status in 2004. It has received gold and silver Artsmark awards. In 2008, the school was re-awarded Healthy School Status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Bernard's is a good school. The outstanding features identified at the last inspection have been sustained and further improvements have been made. It is highly successful, very popular and has a deservedly excellent reputation locally. The atmosphere in the school is a strong reflection of the school's Christian values that underpin the outstanding personal development and well-being of the students. During the inspection, a very high proportion of parents returned questionnaires and commented on their overwhelming support for the school. One parent summed up the feelings of the majority, who feel fortunate and privileged that their children attend St Bernard's. 'The outstanding quality of education is derived from its spiritual ethos of love, care and fairness which is consistently practised by the staff and reflected in the attitudes of pupils and their families.' Students throughout the school thoroughly enjoy their education and are proud to be part of the school community. They were keen to tell inspectors how good the school is and they struggled to think of anything that needed to improve.

Students begin school with above-average levels of attainment, although the range of attainment on entry is wider than usually found in selective schools. This is because of the school's denominational nature and because, in this local authority, 45% of students attend a grammar school. Students achieve results in national examinations that are well above average at all key stages, which represent good progress in relation to their starting points. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make outstanding progress as a result of well-focused support and guidance. Since the last inspection, the school has used data analysis more consistently to identify and target areas where students are not achieving as well as they could. This has led to improvements in the proportion of A* or A grades at GCSE and better progress in developing literacy skills at Key Stage 3. Subject leaders are improving their review of performance across their departments and this is leading to a better awareness of achievement in particular subjects.

The school is rightly proud of its excellent pastoral care and the ways in which it nurtures students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The outstanding provision for care, guidance and support results in exemplary outcomes in all aspects of students' personal development and well-being. Students behave exceptionally well. Anti-social behaviour is dealt with rapidly and incidents of bullying or racism are extremely rare. Students' attendance is outstanding, and they know that there is always someone to turn to for help if they need it. The care and attention given to new students helps them settle in quickly and become part of the school 'family'. The students show respect to each other and demonstrate the concern they feel for others less fortunate than themselves. This respect is translated into the multitude of ways in which they participate in the excellent range of enrichment activities, and contribute to the wider and international community. A powerful and thought-provoking assembly on HIV, planned and delivered by sixth form students following their visit to an AIDS hospice in South Africa, exemplified this. The assembly confronted stereotypes and misconceptions about the disease and challenged other students to take practical action to make a difference.

Teaching and learning is good overall. Teachers are caring and conscientious. One parent commented that, 'The staff work from their hearts to ensure that the children are receiving the best that education can provide.' Learners make good progress because teachers have high expectations and students are well motivated, eager to participate and enjoy learning. A thorough evaluation of teaching methods and students' learning styles has resulted in significant improvements in teaching. Teachers make better use of diagnostic marking to advise students what they need to do to improve. Where teaching is outstanding, the variety of activities and

tasks take account of the pace of students' learning, and learning objectives are carefully planned to provide sufficient intellectual challenge. Lesson observations carried out by senior leaders correctly identify the many strengths that exist in teaching across the school. However, they do not always provide a sharp enough focus on how well teaching is helping students to make progress.

Curriculum provision is outstanding. The broad and balanced curriculum promotes learning, develops students' creativity and challenges them to achieve their best. A wide range of subjects is offered at GCSE, and all students study at least one foreign language from a choice of five. The range of subjects offered at AS level has increased to include textile technology. The school's specialist humanities status has enhanced the curriculum, especially through the literacy support programme that has led to improved results. It has also increased the school's partnership with the local community. The school is addressing the need to develop students' information and communication technology (ICT) skills by providing discrete lessons at Key Stage 3 and improving provision across the curriculum. Personal, social and health education is a major strength of the school and careers guidance is excellent. An excellent range of extra-curricular activities enriches the curriculum. Students have opportunities to work with two other local secondary schools on joint projects, such as the Year 8 poetry festival and the South Africa exchange. The school also has links with a number of local primary schools. These links allow students within the wider community to work together.

The committed and experienced headteacher provides the school with strong leadership. He promotes a clear ethos of maintaining high academic standards while securing students' achievement in its broadest sense. Senior leaders and staff at all levels are dedicated to the school and want the very best for every student. A parent commented, 'The staff and management are experts on how to bring out the best in young people.' The school has developed strong and productive links with the local community and effective national and international links. These are based on a thorough knowledge and understanding of its own community and learners' needs. Self-evaluation has improved significantly since the previous inspection. The school has a good appreciation of its strengths and weaknesses and has put systems in place to introduce a more thorough review of performance across all subject areas. This underpins its good capacity to improve even further. However, the accuracy and pace of self-evaluation is not yet consistent across all levels of leadership and management. As a result, governance of the school is good rather than outstanding. The governors are well informed and provide considerable support although further involvement in self-evaluation would enable them to fulfil more effectively their role as critical friend.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form provides a good education and is highly valued by parents and students. A high proportion of Year 11 students stay on into the sixth form and become excellent role models for younger students. They make a significant contribution to the school and wider community. The sixth form offers a broad, largely academic curriculum providing a wide range of subjects offered to AS and A2 level with some opportunities to take advanced extension qualifications. Examination results are well above the national average and the percentage of A or B grades has risen in recent years. Students make good progress relative to their starting points although there is some variation in achievement in individual subjects from year to year. Students' outstanding personal development and well-being are enriched by a full and varied range of extra-curricular activities, as well as opportunities to take on posts of responsibility. Students

are involved in interesting projects like 'Guardian Angels', an annual celebration for the whole school organised by Year 13 students, and the senior citizens party arranged by Year 12 students. These all develop valuable workplace skills as well as contributing to students' enjoyment and achievement. These activities and projects prepare students well for adult life. Students' aspirations are high and most students proceed to university. They report that they value the good quality of teaching and the dedicated support they receive to further their learning. Relationships between teachers and students are excellent. Students receive regular and detailed feedback on their progress and the good marking of work tells them what they need to do to improve. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good and set a clear direction for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Focus lesson observations and departmental reviews more sharply on how well teaching is helping students to make progress.
- Improve the pace and accuracy of self-evaluation at all levels of leadership and management.

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

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 eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	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**

05 January 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of St Bernard's Catholic Grammar School, Slough, SL3 7AF

Thank you for the superb welcome you gave us when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed meeting you and your teachers and visiting some of your lessons. We think St Bernard's is a good school. The outstanding features identified at the last inspection have been sustained. It is a very special place because of the exceptional care and support that it provides. As well as helping you to achieve excellent results in examinations and make good progress, the school encourages you to become responsible, caring young people. We were very impressed with your behaviour, the respect that you show each other and the efforts you make to help those less fortunate than yourselves. You told us how much you enjoy your lessons and how friendly and supportive the teachers are. You have opportunities to study many different subjects and to take part in a wide range of interesting activities. Your parents care a great deal about your education and do all they can to help you to succeed. The headteacher and senior staff lead your school well. They make sure that you are continually encouraged to have high expectations of yourselves and others.

The sixth form is a very important part of the school and the sixth form students set an excellent example for younger students to follow. They work hard and achieve outstanding examination results as well as involving themselves in a wide range of activities that help the school and the community.

Although there are so many excellent things about your school there is always room for improvement. Your school is becoming better at identifying ways in which it can improve. We have asked the school to make sure that all lessons help you learn as much as you can as well as being enjoyable. We have also asked the senior leaders to involve all staff in helping them work out how they could make the school even better.

We wish you all at St Bernard's a very successful future.

Yours faithfully

Anne Wellham

Her Majesty's Inspector