

Balshaw's Church of England High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119775
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	327127
Inspection date	4 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Ruth James HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	928
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Tim Callaghan
Headteacher	Miss Josephine Venn
Date of previous school inspection	1 June 2006
School address	Church Road Leyland Lancashire PR25 3AH
Telephone number	01772 421009
Fax number	01772 458 213

Age group	11–16
Inspection date	4 June 2009
Inspection number	327127

© Crown copyright 2009

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector.

The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement; teaching and learning and; leadership and management. Evidence was collected from: the school's self-evaluation form; national published assessment data; the school's own assessment records; a range of school documentation; observation of the school at work; discussions with staff and students and; parental questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Balshaw's Church of England High School is a voluntary controlled comprehensive school which takes students from the town of Leyland and the surrounding area. The school is about average size. A low proportion of students receive free school meals. Most students are of White British origin. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is a little below average. The school has held specialist engineering status since 2004. It also holds many awards including Artsmark, Healthy Schools Award, Investors in People, Silver Eco-Award and the Race Equality Mark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Balshaw's is a very good school with outstanding features. Students' personal development and well-being are excellent as a result of the outstanding care, guidance and support they receive. Standards are rising steadily year-on-year, and the good teaching and curriculum provide an environment where students achieve well. Leadership and management are highly effective. Parents are extremely positive about the school. As one parent commented, 'This is an outstanding school with an excellent staff. They not only inspire and encourage students to strive for the best, but also support and develop them as individuals.'

Since the last inspection overall standards, which were already above average, have continued to rise and the proportion of students achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C has increased each year. In 2008, all students achieved at least five grades A* to G. The number of students gaining five or more high grades, including English and mathematics, is consistently, significantly above national averages, although in 2008 this figure was not quite as high as the previous two years. This arose because several students passed either English or mathematics, but not both subjects, although each subject had a high A* to C pass rates. Other subjects with high A* to C pass rates include science, design and technology, and art and design. In many subjects, above average numbers achieve the highest A* or A grades at GCSE. Data which takes account of students' prior attainment and circumstances shows that for students completing their education at the school in 2006 and 2007, progress was good. However, the data for 2008 are indicative of satisfactory progress. This dip in performance is not symptomatic of a declining trend. School data and inspection evidence confirm that current students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are making the good progress that is usual at the school.

Students' thorough enjoyment of school is seen in their very high levels of attendance. Students develop into mature and confident young adults who show a strong sense of responsibility. They are rightly proud of their school. Spiritual, moral social and cultural development are significant strengths, reflecting the school's Christian ethos. Relationships are based on mutual respect and trust. Students respond well to their teachers' encouragement and appreciate each other's success and achievements. They feel safe and secure. Behaviour in lessons and around school is excellent and exclusions are rare. Students readily accept responsibilities and the school council is highly effective. Students know that their opinions are listened to, respected and acted upon. They make very effective contributions to the school community and more widely. Students are well prepared for the world of work or further academic study.

Teaching and learning are good overall, and some lessons are outstanding. Lessons are well planned and focused, with clear objectives. Teachers' subject knowledge is very good. Teachers set high expectations for students and they ensure that attainment levels and grades are understood. Lessons proceed at a good pace. Teachers use a broad range of strategies which meet students' needs very well. Students have very good attitudes to learning. They enjoy their lessons and participate effectively, developing confidence and a range of skills as well as subject knowledge and understanding. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well to enhance learning. In many lessons, teachers make very effective use of resources such as interactive whiteboards. The school has established a 'teacher learning academy', as a major part of its strategy to raise the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers' active involvement in this is helping to improve individual competence further and broadening the sharing of good practice. Assessment procedures ensure that students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to reach the next step in their learning. Students are increasingly involved in

checking their own progress towards specified criteria. The willingness of teachers to give freely of their time, often undertaking extra-curricular activities in school holidays or at weekends to avoid students missing lessons, is a marked characteristic of the school.

The curriculum continues to improve as the school strives to meet the individual needs of its students. The development of GCSE courses such as astronomy and the addition of more vocational courses have enhanced the opportunities available. Effective links with partner institutions enable students to take courses in engineering and construction. Specific courses, such as the handwriting club, are offered where needs are identified and these have a positive effect on both academic performance and self-esteem. Participation in the wide range of extra-curricular activities is very high but the school is never complacent and actively seeks new activities to encourage even more. Very good sporting opportunities contribute well to healthy lifestyles.

Specialist status has been used extremely effectively. Very good results are achieved in the specialist subjects and technology resources have been enhanced and put to good use. The science curriculum has been developed to offer a variety of courses that meet the needs of different groups of students and this is impacting very positively on achievement in science, with a significantly higher proportion expected to gain two grades A* to C or equivalent in science subjects this year. A recent project to build a go-kart, involved a STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) club for a small group of Year 11 students at risk of underachieving. Subject teachers commented on the improved motivation and positive outlook of the students in lessons as well as improved subject understanding. An additional benefit was the teamwork generated by staff from different departments, who were able to exchange ideas and good practice. Excellent use is made of the school's links with local engineering industries.

The outstanding care, guidance and support provided have been enhanced by recent developments in the responsibilities of heads of house, with a stronger focus on academic progress as well as pastoral care. Excellent relationships underpin the caring ethos of the school. Transition arrangements, both on entry to the school and at the time of leaving, are very well managed. Staff are friendly, helpful and supportive. Students have confidence in approaching staff with any problems, secure in the knowledge that they will be resolved. The school meets the needs of its most vulnerable pupils very well, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Internal support mechanisms are supplemented very well through liaison with outside agencies. Students are prepared very well for transfer to next stage or the world of work. Procedures for safeguarding and child protection meet government requirements.

Leadership and management are good. There is a very strong culture of striving for excellence in all that the school does, to provide the best possible experiences and outcomes for the students. The headteacher provides outstanding leadership that is authoritative and purposeful. Her clear vision and determination to provide education and care that will enable students to thrive and achieve are shared by staff at all levels. Many parents remarked specifically on her exceptional leadership. Two comments, typical of many, are: 'The headteacher leads by example and works with boundless enthusiasm to work towards continued improvement of what is already a successful school,' and, 'The headteacher is extremely dedicated to the school and is a wonderful example to the students.'

A strong management focus on strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning, including regular 'learning walks' to monitor the quality of lessons, is supported by teachers. They have responded very positively and are actively engaged in reflecting on their own teaching,

and sharing good practice with others. The benefits can be seen in the consistently high quality lessons. Managers make good use of data from a range of sources and there have been recent developments in the school's system for tracking students' progress. However, not all data are collated and analysed fully to provide managers with an overview of the progress of different groups of students, which would enable support and intervention strategies to be even better targeted. Governors are involved and supportive and are very knowledgeable about the school. A wide range of improvements clearly demonstrate that the capacity to improve is good. The school provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the analysis of data from assessments to further refine the identification of underachievement and the planning of support and intervention strategies.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	----------------

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	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	2

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?	2
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	1
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**

4 June 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Balshaw's Church of England High School, Lancashire,

PR25 3AH

Thank you very much for welcoming us to your school recently. We enjoyed talking to you and seeing you in lessons. We looked at questionnaires from your parents and found that almost all of them are extremely happy with the school. We found that Balshaw's is a very good school, with some outstanding aspects.

You make good progress during your time in the school and achieve above average standards, especially in the school's specialist subjects. This is because teaching in school is consistently good and some lessons are outstanding. Teachers work very hard to ensure that they plan work to meet all of your needs and take care to keep you well informed about how well you are doing.

You behave extremely well, both in lessons and around school, and show very positive attitudes to your studies. Attendance at your school is excellent. Many of you make good contributions to the school and local community. Staff take care of you extremely well, including those of you with particular needs.

The curriculum offers you a good choice of courses and there are plenty of extracurricular activities. Almost all of you join in with something. This contributes to your outstanding personal development.

Your headteacher and senior staff lead and manage the school very well and are clear about priorities for the future. They are constantly looking for ways to improve the school further. Your school provides good value for money.

We have identified one area where the school could do even better. We have asked the headteacher and staff to make better use of the data teachers and managers collect about your progress, so that they can give you even more help to achieve even better.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish all of you every success in the future.

Yours faithfully

Ruth James HMI