

Blessed William Howard Catholic School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124455
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	343787
Inspection dates	10–11 May 2010
Reporting inspector	Gerald Griffin

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
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	953
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	126
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Gerald O'Hara
Headteacher	Mr Philip Smith
Date of previous school inspection	25 March 2009
School address	Rowley Avenue Stafford ST17 9AB
Telephone number	01785 244236
Fax number	01785 225342
Email address	headteacher@blessedwilliamhoward.staffs.sch.uk

Age group	11–18
Inspection dates	10–11 May 2010
Inspection number	343787

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It rates council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

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.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 08456 404045, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the documentation in any way.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2010

Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 30 lessons taught by 28 teachers. They observed break times, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. Inspectors scrutinised students' work, progress records, teachers' lesson plans, school improvement plans, policies and reports. They analysed 210 students' questionnaires, 12 staff questionnaires and 100 parents' and carers' questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the progress made by students, especially the girls, students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and in English across the school
- the quality of the challenge that teachers provide to secure better progress in lessons
- students' understanding of their targets and how they can improve their work
- improvements to the health education and citizenship curriculum
- the effectiveness of improvement planning in accelerating progress across the school.

Information about the school

Blessed William Howard is an average-sized secondary school in Stafford. It serves the Catholic community from a wide geographical area in the archdiocese of Birmingham. The majority of students are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average. Most of these have dyslexia, moderate learning difficulties or emotional and behavioural difficulties. The proportion of students who have statements of special educational needs is above average. The school was re-designated a specialist arts college in 2006. Post-16 provision is supported by a consortium with other Stafford schools and colleges. The school has recently gained a number of awards including the Princess Diana Award for anti-bullying.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act, 2005 Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer needs significant improvement. Blessed William Howard provides a satisfactory quality of education. The school is improving rapidly because of the clearly focused plans and determined leadership of the headteacher. Self-evaluation, though over-modest in its judgements, identifies strengths and weaknesses accurately. Achievement, which was judged inadequate by the last inspection, is satisfactory. Students' behaviour, the curriculum and several key areas of leadership, which were judged satisfactory, are now good. The leaders' drive to improve the school is clearly articulated and enthusiastically shared by the staff. The record of strong leadership, together with the school's rigorous monitoring and effective self-evaluation, shows its good capacity for continued improvement.

Progress is improving across the school as underachievement is systematically tackled. This is especially so where progress has been slow in the past: in English, for girls and for many students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. While attainment is average overall, it is rising because standards are improving in nearly all subjects. Teaching is improving and accelerating students' progress. A significant proportion of lessons seen were judged good and a few outstanding, across the school. Students find lessons interesting and relevant and are keen to learn. Teachers use computers and other resources well to engage learners and develop their knowledge and understanding. However, teaching overall is satisfactory because the level of challenge that it provides is not yet consistently good. Typically this is because teachers do not use progress data consistently well enough to plan work that matches precisely the needs of each student in the class. Sometimes the pace of learning slows when students are not given enough work to do. Most students have a clear understanding of their academic targets but the quality of the advice they receive about how they can reach them, especially through marking, is too variable.

Students make good gains in their personal development. They enjoy school and this is reflected in their above average attendance. They are well behaved in lessons and around the school. They say bullying is rare and that they feel very safe. While students are mostly committed to taking plenty of exercise they do not show the same determination to eat healthy snacks at break and some feel that they do not get enough advice about a healthy diet. Students reflect maturely on their feelings and those of others and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The arts specialism plays a vibrant role in enhancing the curriculum. The interest and challenge that the curriculum provides is promoting accelerated progress.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that the level of challenge and progress in lessons is consistently good by:
 - making better use of assessment information to plan work that closely matches the needs of each student so they are fully stretched
 - sustaining a good pace of learning throughout lessons.
 - Sharpen the quality of marking and other feedback to students so that they better understand how to reach their challenging targets.
 - Improve the quality of health education to better develop students' understanding of and commitment to maintaining a healthy diet.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next Section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

All groups of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, enjoy learning, and their achievement is satisfactory. The learning observed in lessons was at least satisfactory, but often good and sometimes outstanding throughout the school. Learners are increasingly taking responsibility for the quality of their work by assessing its worth for themselves and comparing its standard to that of their peers. Their research and planning skills are quickly improving and many are becoming proficient as independent learners. Most students relish discussing ideas in small groups and with their class, which is promoting their self-confidence, communication skills and understanding. However, occasionally students chatter when the pace of learning slows. Progress is accelerating in subjects other than English too. For example, nearly all of the current Year 11 students have gained a GCSE qualification in information communication and technology. Results in design and technology and drama, which have been below other subjects in the past, are set to rise significantly this year. These gains have been helped by the school's good use of its robust tracking system to quickly identify students who are falling behind; thus it can provide them with extra help which enables them to catch up missed work. This has especially helped improve progress in English, for girls and students with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The rare cases of bullying are quickly resolved by the school and this is reflected in its national award. Students have a good perception of what constitutes unsafe situations and how to keep themselves safe, for instance on the internet. They are keen to take responsibility. For example, in a lively assembly, a group of Year 10 girls were promoting a survey to help the school provide sports and other clubs that girls especially wanted. A strong moral code underpins students' good behaviour. They have a good understanding of the diversity of British culture.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

In lessons relationships are positive. Teachers plan a wide variety of activities that engage students actively in their learning. For example, a Year 9 science class had researched viscosity and then planned and undertook experiments to test their ideas. While many teachers are making good use of progress data to plan activities that challenge each student well, this is not the consistent picture across all lessons. Students do not always cover sufficient work in a lesson because they are not expected to work quickly enough. Teaching assistants provide valuable support for students, especially those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. There are some outstanding examples of marking and feedback to students, for example in history. However, again this is not the consistent picture across the school.

The arts are a strong feature of the curriculum. All Year 7 students take part in productions and many gain the Trinity College Bronze Arts Award. Music is a special strength and many students perform to a high standard. The curriculum is flexible and offers a wide range of options for 14 to 19 year olds, which meet their needs and aspirations.

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Students of different abilities are provided with appropriate courses. For example, high attaining students take GCSE examinations early and are offered extra subjects such as Spanish, after school. A good range of educational visits, popular sports and other clubs add to students' enjoyment of school. Nearly half of all students in Year 10 are enrolled on the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, which shows students' enthusiasm for these activities. Citizenship, which was a weak area of the curriculum at the time of the last inspection, has improved quickly and is proving most popular. Year 7 said how much they had enjoyed learning about the recent General Election.

Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive sympathetic care and learning programmes that enable them to take a full part in all school activities. The recently revised behaviour code is welcomed by students although they say that it is not yet consistently applied by all staff. However, across the school, it is proving effective at reducing inappropriate behaviour. The school liaises closely with a very wide range of external agencies to support students' learning and welfare. For example, together with the education welfare officer, it is providing first class support for families in challenging circumstances that secures their children's good attendance. The school's targeted support for students whose circumstances have the potential to make them vulnerable is effective.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders articulate clearly to staff their ambitious targets and their plans to make the school better. While some middle leaders are new, they are already taking a good level of responsibility for checking and ensuring standards are improving in their areas. Leaders have accurately identified needs and, supported by good partnerships with consultants, have provided successful training that has sharpened teachers' skills; for example, improving class management so that behaviour is no longer a barrier to learning.

The governors work hard on behalf of the school and challenge it robustly over its performance. The well attended 'Getting Started' evenings in September are one example of the school's valuable help and advice to parents, which enables them to support their child's education at home. The school puts its commitment to equal opportunities at the centre of its ethos and the success of its plans to remedy previous gender differences shows that its policies are having a good impact. Safety and

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

safeguarding are a high priority. Child protection procedures are robust, regularly updated and fully meet current safeguarding requirements. The checks that the school makes on the suitability of adults to work with students are rigorous. The school recognises that its systems to ensure the regular evaluation of the impact of some health and safety policies are not such high quality. The school has evaluated its religious, ethnic and socio-economic context thoroughly, and the school is a happy harmonious society. Links to local communities, especially in the arts, are developing as are links to communities abroad.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

Most students enter the sixth form with average levels of attainment. They make satisfactory progress in their courses to reach average standards by the time they leave school. Their learning is improving. Students are increasingly becoming articulate and confident independent learners with high aspirations. They judge their own performance against examination criteria well, which is giving them a clear picture of how they can make their work better. This is helped by well-focussed advice from teachers. Lessons are lively and interesting and students are given good opportunities to research and test their ideas in groups and through practical work. Occasionally the work teachers plan does not match students' needs accurately enough, which means some struggle with an activity that is too hard while others find it too easy. The collegiate arrangements provide a very wide choice of courses that meet students' ambitions. Students are well cared for. They behave well and readily take responsibility. They are keen to set a good example to younger students and their personal development is good. Leaders provide

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

valuable training for staff that is promoting their sixth form teaching skills well.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

About one tenth of parents and carers returned a questionnaire. Most indicated that they were happy with the quality of education their child is receiving. Many added positive comments about how much their children enjoy school, the very good care their children receive and the improving communication between home and school.

Inspectors agree with these positive views. A small number of parents expressed their concerns about the use of supply staff in English lessons and how this is affecting their child's progress. Inspectors recognise that the school has been through a difficult period of staff changes and absence. They found that currently staffing is more stable and that progress of students in English is satisfactory. A few parents raised concerns about poor behaviour. Inspectors found that behaviour is good in lessons and around the school and that it is improving as a result of the recently revised code of conduct. Some parents thought students need more advice about maintaining healthy diets. Inspectors agree that this is an area for the school to develop.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Blessed William Howard Catholic School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 100 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 953 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	31	31	61	60	7	7	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	28	28	68	67	2	2	2	2
The school informs me about my child's progress	42	42	47	47	6	6	3	3
My child is making enough progress at this school	30	30	48	48	19	19	2	2
The teaching is good at this school	19	19	65	64	12	12	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	15	15	59	58	20	20	2	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	11	11	61	60	20	20	3	3
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	19	19	54	53	13	13	2	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	23	23	58	57	13	13	2	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	14	14	59	58	17	17	5	5
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	14	14	57	56	19	19	3	3
The school is led and managed effectively	18	18	57	56	15	15	3	3
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	30	30	54	54	14	14	2	2

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



12 May 2010

Dear students

Inspection of Blessed William Howard Catholic School, Stafford, ST17 9AB

Thank you for being so polite and friendly when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed our visit, talking to you and seeing you in lessons. I especially enjoyed my visit to the Year 10 assembly. You are rightly proud of the school's happy atmosphere in which you all get on well together. We think Blessed William Howard is a satisfactory school and no longer needs significant improvement. Here are some of the things we found out:

Your progress is satisfactory and it is improving, especially in English.

You told us you enjoy school and feel very safe and secure.

You try your best to take plenty of exercise.

Your behaviour is good.

You have good relationships with your teachers and you try hard for them.

The curriculum provides you with exciting clubs and visits, which you enjoy.

The staff look after you well and are always ready to help you.

The headteacher and staff are working hard to make the school get better.

We have asked the school to do three things to help you improve still more in your learning:

Make sure teachers quicken the rate at which you learn and always provide work for you that is neither too hard nor too easy so you make better progress.

Improve marking and other feedback you get from teachers so that you know how to raise your level of work in all subjects.

Provide you with more information about a healthy diet so that you become as committed to this as you are to taking plenty of exercise.

You can help the school by continuing to try your best in lessons, behaving well and attending regularly. I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Gerald Griffin

Lead inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 08456 404045, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.