

St Bonaventure's RC School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	102787
Local Authority	Newham
Inspection number	323694
Inspection date	19 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Deborah Vaughan-Jenkins HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School (total)	1303
Sixth form	361
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Monsignor John Armitage
Headteacher	Mr Stephen Foster
Date of previous school inspection	22 February 2006
School address	Boleyn Road Forest Gate London E7 9QD
Telephone number	020 8472 3844
Fax number	020 8471 2749

Age group	11–19
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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 sixth form and investigated the following issues: the standards reached by pupils, the quality of teaching and learning, the curriculum and impact of specialist status, community cohesion, and the quality of leadership and management.

Evidence was gathered from: the school's self-evaluation; achievement and attainment information; observation of lessons; scrutiny of documentation provided by the school; observation of the school at work; discussion with senior and middle managers; talking to staff and students; and analysis of parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but 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

St Bonaventure's is a larger than average Catholic comprehensive school for boys aged between 11 and 19, located in Newham, East London. The school predominantly recruits students from the north-east London area. Currently, there are 1,303 students on roll, of whom 361 study in the school's sixth form. The sixth form is run jointly with St Angela's Ursuline School for girls. A much higher than average proportion of students is entitled to free school meals. Just over a quarter of all students have some form of learning difficulty and/or disability, predominantly moderate learning difficulties or behavioural emotional and social difficulties. The proportion of students with statemented needs is low. The proportion of students from a diverse range of minority ethnic groups is considerably higher than is usually found, with students of Black African and Black Caribbean heritage being the two largest groups. Over half of the total student cohort speaks English as a second language, which is well above average. The school has held specialist status for technology since 1994. In 2006, it gained a second specialism, for languages, and in April 2008 gained specialist status for applied learning. Since the last inspection, the school has also achieved the Healthy School award.

Onsite childcare at Stepping Stones Nursery is not managed by the governing body and was inspected separately on 19th March.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

St Bonaventure's continues to be an outstanding school, providing a community where each individual student can grow spiritually, academically and socially, as outlined by its mission. Its highly inclusive nature is successfully removing the barriers to education faced by many of its students. Subsequently, they excel within the school's lively learning environment and thoroughly enjoy their educational experience. One parent's comments summed up the view of many, 'St Bonaventure's is a very good and caring school to send your child, my child is blessed to go here'.

Students enter the school in Year 7 with broadly average levels of attainment. During their time at school, they make outstanding progress, particularly in mathematics. Frequent and careful analysis by managers of the performance by different ethnic groups ensures no one group underperforms. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive excellent levels of support and achieve as well as their peers. The overall standards reached by students by Year 11 are above average. The standards reached in technology-related subjects, including mathematics, are exceptionally high. In fact, a key strength of the school is how it is using its specialist status in technology to motivate students, raise standards and accelerate progress. In 2008, the proportion of students achieving a GCSE A* to C in the three main technology subjects improved further and remain significantly above expectations. The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE A* to C grades including English and mathematics also remains consistently high. The more recent language specialism is also beginning to impact on students' participation and progression. However, the school recognises that although standards are improving, more work is needed to ensure greater consistency of improvement across the languages.

Students have affection for their school and very good attitudes to learning. As a result attendance is excellent. In lessons and around the school students' behaviour is exemplary and meets the high expectations set for them. A calm and supportive Catholic ethos underpins students' social, moral, cultural and spiritual development. One student said when asked what he valued about his school, 'I really like my school because of the good atmosphere; it helps you learn'. Relationships at every level are of a high order and based on mutual respect. Teaching and learning are outstanding. Lessons are well planned and interesting because teachers have good subject knowledge. Teachers track carefully the progress that students make and identify quickly where progress slows, and provide additional help when needed. They plan lessons that provide carefully structured activities to challenge groups of students of different abilities so that they all make the best possible progress. Marking is regular and evaluative, giving students a clear understanding of where and how they can improve their work.

The curriculum has improved since the last inspection and is now outstanding. The careful restructuring of the curriculum has resulted in an improved range of option choices for students, providing them with a flexible range of course choices which are closely tailored to meet their individual needs. The newly introduced Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) courses in art and design and media, for example, and Diploma course are challenging while being within reach of a broad range of abilities. Students appreciate the wider range of course options open to them and the improved opportunities to extend their studies into the sixth form. The curriculum is enriched by visits out of school to greatly extend learning beyond the classroom.

The school provides exceptional care, guidance and support for all students. All safeguarding requirements are rigorously managed. Students are confident in the care provided for them and recognise that they can seek academic and personal support, assured of a rapid response from staff. Attendance and behaviour, although excellent, are nevertheless very carefully monitored. Academic guidance is very efficiently managed and all students are fully involved in setting their own targets for learning and reviewing the progress they are making.

Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher provides inspirational leadership. He and the strong senior management team have been the driving force behind the school's continued success. Since the last inspection, the significant investment in staff training and development has continued, enabling the school to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and strengthen the role of middle managers and improve the sharing of best practice. The school evaluates its provision and outcomes thoroughly and has excellent awareness of the areas it needs to improve. This, along with improvements in the curriculum and the exceptional progress made by students, demonstrate the school has an outstanding capacity to improve further.

The school's approach to community cohesion is outstanding. It positively promotes its Christian values and celebrates cultural and religious diversity through all aspects of its work. As a consequence, students demonstrate a heightened awareness and appreciation of other faiths and cultures. The school's commitment to supporting the local community is impressive. Through its extensive and often innovative partnership working, the school plays a pivotal role in helping to raise aspirations in the Newham area, for example through providing access to adult education and family learning programmes. In addition, several school teaching staff are mentoring teachers in local primary and secondary schools to help raise achievement in technology and languages. Links have been established with Newham's refugee centre to help engage young people currently not able to attend a school and increase their levels of confidence. The school is rightly held in very high regard by both the local community and parents alike. It continues to provide outstanding value for money.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

This is a good sixth form. Increasing numbers of students enter the sixth form from the main school. The school's own data indicate that most students make good progress, although this varies by subject. Overall pass rates are slightly above national averages. However the proportion of students achieving the highest grades A and B is below national averages both at AS- and A-level. The school recognises the need to improve this and, as a consequence of the actions taken, can demonstrate an improving trend over the last three years. The school has broadened its curriculum to better meet students' needs and has strengthened its intervention strategies and the monitoring of individual students with the aim of ensuring better consistency of student achievement across subjects. The school is particularly successful in raising standards of its Black African and Black Caribbean students, which remain well above the respective national averages. The positive influence and impact of community cohesion permeate the sixth form also. Students are involved in community initiatives such as working with a local organisation to help make east London a safe and happy neighbourhood. Sixth form students take pride in their roles as prefects around the school and act as very good role models for younger students. The vast majority of students progress to higher education. The sixth form is well led and has a good capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve consistency of progress and standards attained by all students across all subjects in the sixth form.

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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?	1	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	1	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	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?	1	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	2
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?	1	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	1	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	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	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
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**

31 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of St Bonaventure's RC School, London, E7 9QD

I would like to begin by thanking you all for welcoming me and my colleague to your school on 19th March. Your behaviour, courtesy and very smart appearance impressed us from the outset. During the day we spent at your school we visited your lessons, met a number of you, and talked at length to various members of school staff. This letter aims to outline to you our findings from the day.

We found that your school continues to be outstanding in almost all aspects. The progress you make through Years 7 to 11 is excellent. You develop a particularly firm understanding of mathematics, helped very much by your school's specialist status in technology that prepares you well for life after school. In fact, a very high and increasing number of you progress into the sixth form and through into higher education. We judged the sixth form to be good with outstanding features. Overall, students in the sixth form make good progress but both progress and exam results vary by subject. Therefore, we have left the school with the following area to improve:

- the consistency of progress made and standards attained by all students across all subjects in the sixth form.

Your headteacher, along with his team, is doing an excellent job in ensuring St Bonaventure's continued success. Your school knows exactly what is needed to improve and is committed to making your experience in education enjoyable and successful.

You can of course help maintain your school's outstanding status by continuing to work as hard as you can to achieve your best. You should also continue to share your views through your school council. In this way, the school will continue to know what you think it does well or what you think it needs to improve further.

Thank you again for your help in this inspection and we would like to wish you all the very best in your studies and every success in the future.

Yours faithfully

Deborah Vaughan-Jenkins

Her Majesty's Inspector