

St Bernard's Catholic Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110084
Local Authority	Slough
Inspection number	378049
Inspection dates	29–30 September 2011
Reporting inspector	Clare Gillies

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
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	866
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	242
Appropriate authority	The Governing Body
Chair	Paul Delaloye
Headteacher	John McAteer
Date of previous school inspection	23 November 2008
School address	1 Langley Road Slough SL3 7AF
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. They observed 47 lessons and parts of lessons and saw about 50 teachers. Meetings were held with several groups of students, including members of the school council, members of the governing body, senior leaders and members of staff. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at its self-evaluation, lesson observation records, the development plan and current monitoring data, and analysed questionnaires completed by 670 parents and carers, over 50 staff, and students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The quality of lesson observations and departmental reviews.
- The accuracy of self-evaluation at all levels of leadership and management.
- Whether teaching and learning were as outstanding as the 2011 GCSE and A-level results would suggest.

Information about the school

The school is unique in being the only mixed, Catholic, state, voluntary-aided grammar school in the country. Four out of five students are Roman Catholic, some of whom travel from outside the local authority. Close to 70% of students are from White British, Irish or other White backgrounds with small percentages from several minority ethnic groups. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is very low, as is the proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals. There are more girls than boys in the school, especially in Years 7 and 10. The school was awarded Artsmark Silver in 2010 and Fair Trade status was re-awarded in 2011. The school retains a focus on its humanities specialist subjects of English, history and religious education.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

St Bernard's is an outstandingly effective school. The percentage of parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire was extremely high. Almost all of them expressed overwhelming praise for the school. They quite rightly used adjectives such as 'fantastic', 'brilliant', 'inspirational' and 'exceptional'. Students and staff were equally effusive in their descriptions of the school. Staff are proud to work at the school. Students enjoy all aspects of school and feel very safe; their behaviour is very mature and considerate. Every single student who completed the questionnaire feels that adults care about them. This underpins their confidence to be enthusiastic and willing learners.

Students learn extremely well because so much teaching is of a very high quality. They make excellent progress and attain outstanding percentages of A*/A grades at GCSE and A level. Practically all sixth-formers proceed to university. At the same time, students' personal development is a top priority, supported by the school's thoughtful and effective balance between academic and non-academic needs. In all years, the care, guidance, and welfare and spiritual support students receive are outstanding. As a parent observed: 'My children are all very successful in their lives, thanks to the school.'

Students' understanding of moral and social standards is excellent and they, and their parents and carers, appreciate how the Catholic faith underpins this. One of the school's aims is to 'provide an opportunity for the balanced development of the student's intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual qualities'. This is achieved and witnessed by students' racial and cultural harmony and respect for other religions.

Coinciding with the inspection was Guardian Angels day, one of the highlights of the school's calendar. To show their appreciation of all staff, Year 13 students take over the running of the school, prepare lunch and buy presents for the staff, and organise sports and entertainment for the entire community. The inspectors felt privileged to witness the outcome of the sixth-formers' energy and hours of preparation, and to share in the fun and enjoyment of all the activities, especially the sensitive, but hilarious, show parodying the staff. The day exemplified the headteacher's conviction that students know the high expectations of behaviour on this special day and respect the trust placed in them.

The vast majority of parents and carers who completed the questionnaire feel that the headteacher and senior leaders 'do a good job'. They are right, though they

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actually do an outstanding job. The headteacher has led the school astutely and generated steady improvements in academic standards over several years and he has gained the students' respect and affection. Senior and middle leaders and all staff continue to support him extremely well.

The governing body is reflective and challenging and, under its new Chair, keen to address its acknowledged lack of formal monitoring of the impact of some policies such as the equalities policy. At all levels of leadership, there is a very strong determination to keep moving forward. Initiatives are trialled and monitored very well. The school's self-evaluation is thorough and accurate, generating a realistic development plan with ambitious targets. Combined with the leadership team's and staff's wealth of experience and expertise, the school's capacity to improve even further is outstanding.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- To ensure that every possible development is considered and evaluated, the governing body and senior leaders must formalise their monitoring of the equalities and community cohesion policies, including accessibility plans, by the end of the academic year.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**1**

In Years 7 to 9, the percentage of students making more than the expected levels of progress in English and mathematics is high. This progress continues in all subjects and, in 2011, GCSE results were the best ever with 63% A*/A grades. Minor differences between girls' and boys' achievements fluctuate yearly and no ethnic group performs better than others. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make equally outstanding progress as a result of high-quality support.

Students are enthusiastic and keen to learn and join in all the other activities on offer. Their well-above-average attendance and punctuality reflect their enjoyment of school life. In lessons seen during the inspection, students enjoyed working in groups and presenting their findings to each other. They were attentive, inquisitive and relished solving problems and assessing their own and each other's work. With modern technology skills, high levels of English and mathematical competence and well-planned work experience, they are extremely well prepared for their future studies and lives.

Despite narrow corridors, students move calmly between lessons and settle to work quickly; their behaviour is exemplary. A parent correctly described how the school gives students 'a clear vision of excellence and behavioural boundaries and expectations that resonate with students' ambitions and attitudes'. Students observe that they are sensible because they 'thrive on trust'.

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Students have a very strong appreciation of the importance of leading healthy lives and keeping themselves safe. The personal, social and health education programme includes a strong element of safety awareness, discussing mobile phones or internet sites, for example.

Students' contribution to the school and local community is significant. They take on numerous different positions of responsibility and the school council is highly valued and effective. Students keenly and generously support many charities and offer practical help in local primary schools. Students of all faiths attend the school's religious services and their outstanding appreciation of spiritual, moral and social issues is strongly reinforced by religious education lessons.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

How effective is the provision?

The large majority of teaching is good with much that is outstanding. Students are often enthused by their teachers' expert subject knowledge and excited by the stimulating activities and resources teachers use. Teachers' confidence means that they vary the pace of learning and respond to students' interests and observations. Most teachers ask well-considered questions which make students think hard, and then skilfully respond to answers with questions demanding higher levels of response.

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

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Teachers know how well students are doing and effectively tailor their lessons and marking to the next steps of learning. Students also know how well they are doing and how to do even better which has a very positive impact on learning and achievement. In the particularly effective lessons, students are engrossed, find the work stimulating and they discuss and evaluate their work together; teachers steer rather than shape their thinking.

The academic curriculum matches students’ abilities and interests very well with, for example, several modern foreign languages on offer and a wide choice of option subjects at GCSE. The humanities specialist subjects have very successfully focused on extending students’ high-level literacy skills. The enormous range of sporting, musical and other activities is a significant factor in students’ enjoyment of school life and has a very positive impact on their personal development. The Duke of Edinburgh’s award and public speaking and debating are popular and most departments take students out on visits, field trips and theatre trips and invite speakers to the school. Years 7 to 11 have day retreats to support the school’s spiritual direction and this has a very positive impact on their spiritual, moral and social development. Provision for gifted and talented students is well considered with relevant courses, for example on thinking skills.

Many parents and carers wrote on their questionnaires how well the school encourages children to grow into confident and independent individuals ‘as well as being inspired to become caring and responsible young citizens’. Students appreciate the highly effective all-round support they receive from staff. Indeed, the quality of care they receive is outstanding – thoughtful, sensitive and well organised. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, or other issues that prevent them from learning well, receive exactly the right level of extra teaching or personal support. Sixth-form students are instrumental in supporting some Year 7 students who struggle with, for example, some technical aspects of language. Several older students recalled specific help they received when younger and how it helped them to move forward.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils’ needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The leadership and management of the headteacher and senior team are

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outstandingly effective in nurturing ambition and securing improvement. In the staff questionnaires, all agreed that they know what the school is trying to achieve. This reflects how well the governors, headteacher and senior leaders communicate the school's paramount aim, that all students will achieve their best in every way and lead fulfilling lives. No student slips through the net because their personal and academic needs are identified early on. Progress tracking and data analysis are thorough, being generated and used by all staff. The upward trend in examination results reflects the headteacher's subtle, but pervasive, drive for improvement.

The monitoring and overview of teaching and learning have improved since the previous inspection. Following consultation with students, the lesson observation form now focuses more on learning and progress. It generates a good understanding of where teaching strengths, that can be shared, exist. Senior leaders undertake major department reviews but their depth would be enhanced by more specialist input. The staff handbook contains helpful points about teaching skills.

The governing body is composed of supportive individuals who bring a useful range of professional expertise to its deliberations. Many governors are current or past parents. They, with senior leaders, ensure that the good safeguarding procedures are kept under review and adhered to at all times. They responded well to an issue raised in the previous inspection and are now fully involved in evaluation. They have considerable insight into, for example, how individual subjects perform academically. Where governors have established links with subjects they have been productive.

Governors review and revise all statutory policies regularly but acknowledge that they have not formally monitored their impact, especially the community cohesion and equality policies and the accessibility plan. That is not to say that equality is not promoted vigorously. There is no doubt that all members of the school community respect people regardless of race, disability or gender and that equality of opportunity underpins the school's work. A parent observed that it is 'a school that prides itself on justice, respect and equality for all'.

Much of the accommodation is cramped and in need of repair, particularly the music, art and staff rooms. Few parts of the building are accessible by wheelchair and plans to address this have yet to be prioritised.

Education and charity partnerships with schools in Europe and a township in South Africa broaden students' horizons, as do links with local primary and secondary schools and sports partnerships. The school's contribution to community cohesion is good; for example, students run computer clubs for a local refugee support group and older members of the community. The school has limited contact with schools in completely different areas of the UK.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
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	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

The vast majority of Year 11 students stay at the school and complete two years in the sixth form. In 2011, students attained over 50% A* or A grades at A level and AS results were also well above average. Students make excellent progress and achieve places at their first-choice university. Parents and carers correctly observe that the careers advice and support for university applications is outstanding. Many subjects are offered for A level and, where necessary, students can study others in two local grammar schools. Acknowledging that students are not enthusiastic about the compulsory general studies course the school continues to review its place in the curriculum.

One of the school's aims is to 'develop the potential of all students by encouraging them to learn for themselves in a search for knowledge and truth'. This is fully achieved in the sixth form where teaching is skilful and inspiring, and helps students to understand how to improve their work. Students often carry out research and prepare presentations with thoughtful content. What some of them lack is expertise in presentation skills so that they can deliver their findings in imaginative ways.

The care and support students receive is as outstanding as in the main school and has a very positive impact on students' learning. Through the junior management team, sixth-formers play a major role in the school and act as role models, for example running clubs for younger students. Sixth-formers undertake community service and many enjoy preparing for and participating in the national mock trial competition. Leadership of the sixth form is outstanding because the senior leader and tutors balance subtle observation, monitoring and guidance with respect for the students' maturity.

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These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1
Taking into account:	1
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

Over 75%, an exceptionally high percentage, of parents and carers responded to the questionnaire. Many of them added compliments about the school, praising the leadership, the quality of teaching and how students are extremely happy and enthusiastic about learning.

A very few respondents noted concerns including that they would like their children to experience more physical activity and sport, that it took a long time to see teachers at parents' evenings and that a few subjects did not have enough textbooks. Inspectors noted that physical activity was not compulsory in Year 13 but did not observe any lessons where there was a lack of textbooks. They are not in a position to comment on parents' evenings.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Bernard’s Catholic Grammar 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 670 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 866 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	464	69	197	29	6	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	486	73	180	27	1	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	373	56	273	41	9	1	1	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	373	56	268	40	10	1	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	418	62	242	36	1	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	343	51	295	44	20	3	1	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	273	41	348	52	33	5	1	0
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)	365	54	262	39	12	2	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	362	54	280	42	13	2	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	362	54	273	41	13	2	2	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	278	41	331	49	23	3	1	0
The school is led and managed effectively	488	73	174	26	2	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	495	74	164	24	2	0	0	0

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 all 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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 are for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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 pupils' 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.



October 1 2011

Dear Students

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

We thoroughly enjoyed the two days we spent in your school and it was a great privilege to witness Guardian Angels day which we enjoyed so much. Thank you all for your warm welcome and for talking to us so eloquently about the school you love. It is certainly an outstanding school, confirmed by the outcomes of the questionnaires. There were some amazing responses, for example all of you who completed the questionnaire feel that adults care about you and that the headteacher and senior staff do a good job - we actually think they do an outstanding job! Your parents and carers and the staff were just as effusive in their praise.

You learn very well and achieve such high GCSE and A-level results because you are so receptive to the outstanding teaching you receive. We were most impressed with your maturity and excellent behaviour. It is evident that it is the respect and trust you are given that contributes to these attributes. You also appreciate the wonderful extra-curricular opportunities, the outstanding care, guidance and support on offer and that your non-academic achievements are valued as much as your examination successes.

The governing body and senior leaders review all the policies they are required to have by law. However, they have not prioritised the aspects they wish to improve for two important policies related to community cohesion and equalities. This is the only area that we have asked them to improve in the future.

We are confident that the school will continue to go from strength to strength and that, with your loyal support, it will continue to produce students who are confident, ready to go to university and to face the world. We wish you all the very best for your futures.

Yours sincerely

Clare Gillies
Lead inspector

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