



DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD



Inspection Report

Name of School: St Bernard's High School

Unique Reference Number: 137312

Inspection Date: 3 October, 2012

**Reporting Inspectors: Dr Michael Sutherland-Harper and
Mgr George Stokes**

This Inspection was carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of School: Academy
School Category: Non-maintained
Age range of pupils: 11 - 18
Gender of pupils: Girls
Number on roll: 883
Appropriate Authority: The Governing Body
Date of previous inspection:
15.3.2007

School Address:
Milton Road
Westcliff-on-Sea
Essex
SS0 7JS
Tel. No. 01702 343583
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Chair of Governors: Mr Roger Calton
Headteacher: Mrs Patricia Barron

Introduction:

The Inspection was carried out under Section 48 of the Education (Schools) Act 2005 by two inspectors appointed by the Diocesan Bishop at the request of the Governing Body of the School.

The Inspectors acknowledge and are appreciative of the full support, co-operation and courtesy they enjoyed from the Governors, Headteacher, Staff and Students of the School both before and during the Inspection. The Inspectors wish to express their gratitude to all concerned.

The focus of the Section 48 Inspection was:

- Classroom Religious Education
- The Catholic nature of the School through:
 1. Worship
 2. Links with the Catholic and wider community
- Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development

The Section 48 Report

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Westcliff-on-Sea
Essex
SS0 7JS

Head Teacher: Mrs Patricia Barron

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Description of the School:

St Bernard's High School is a Catholic school for girls with an open-access, mixed sixth form. It is situated in Westcliff-on-Sea in the county of Essex and in the diocese of Brentwood. The school is an average-sized secondary school. The school is situated within the parish of Our Lady Help of Christians. It also serves the Catholic families worshipping in the 10 feeder parishes within the Southend Deanery and students travelling from other parts of Essex.

Record of Evidence Base:

Two Diocesan Inspectors were in the school for the equivalent of two inspection days.

- The study of pre-inspection documentation including the Self-Evaluation Form/ Denominational Provision (SEF/DP).
- The observation of nine lessons.
- Scrutiny of students' written work.
- Meetings with the Headteacher, the Head of Religious Education (R.E.), the Vice-Chair of Governors and students.
- Observations of R.E. displays in the classrooms and around the school.

What the School does well:

St Bernard's High School is an outstanding Catholic school. Its mission to support and nurture students both academically and spiritually is well illustrated by the school motto, 'Dieu mon abri' – 'God is my shelter'. The school is an inclusive community centred on ensuring that students are well cared for and educated within a caring and empowering framework embodied by the statement, 'Love one another as I have loved you'. This clear ethos permeates the school and is further developed in biannual Catholic Ethos Days and through the governing body's ethos committee. Gospel values are reflected in the mission statement of the school and especially in the dedicated pastoral work done by staff with students who are keen to support the school by developing their roles further. The curriculum on offer reinforces the Catholic ethos of the school effectively.

Under the focused leadership of its determined headteacher, who is capably supported by staff and governors, the school has refined its procedures, clarified its goals and is quickly plugging any remaining gaps, including through the continuing development of Religious Education (R.E.) across the school. The roles of middle managers, such as the recently appointed Head of R.E., have been developed in order that the school may reach the very highest levels of attainment. The school has a well articulated vision of where it wants to go and clear development plans for getting there, which would benefit from the addition of some further review dates to assess progress on the journey. Supportive and experienced governors know the school well, bring in a range of skills and are always ready to challenge in order to secure further improvement. Links with parents and carers and other partnerships to develop student skills are strong.

Provision for prayer, collective worship and the liturgical life of the school is outstanding and is reinforced by the school's close links with local parishes, feeder schools and the diocese. Students are always supportive of each other and enjoy strong bonds with adults. As such, prayer is seen as a natural part of school life and includes moments for reflection within classes because the prayer is frequently linked to personal experiences brought in by the teachers and students. Every form has a liturgical prefect. St Bernard's

has frequently participated in liturgical events beyond the school, thereby enhancing its reputation. It is now looking at ways to incorporate an increased student voice in planning, preparation and direction of whole school liturgical events. The school has recently appointed its experienced previous head of R.E. as a school chaplain in order to further develop this rich seam of prayer and worship. The school's prayer life is one of the main components in ensuring that St Bernard's is a cohesive community which also takes itself into the world beyond the school, locally and globally. Links with the world of university education have been put in place to develop students' understanding of theology and R.E. All Sixth Form students also take a general R.E. course to continue the exploration of their faith.

The majority of teaching is good and the rest is outstanding. No teaching is less than good. Teachers have good subject knowledge, know their students well and make effective use of questioning, electronic technology and a growing range of resources to advance learning and ensure good achievement. Lessons are sometimes teacher dominated as teachers seek to reinforce student skills and be sure that all understanding is secure. As a result, opportunities for students to take their own learning forward independently and raise their contribution levels so they become consistently outstanding are not yet fully in place. Where enough time is allowed for such contributions and students are pushed to explain how and why they think as they do, progress is rapid. Students show every sign of being able to fly when they are engaged in this way because they are naturally curious about the world around them. The quality of display in classrooms varies in terms of reflecting student interests and the issues facing believers in the world of today. Where classrooms are shared with another subject, there is room for discussion about how the display space might reflect themes of cross-curricular interest.

The new head of R.E. is building on the work of her predecessor, continuing to sharpen staff skills and raising the profile of the subject because of the sense of excitement about R.E. which she clearly generates. Expectations are clear and parallel the priorities set by the headteacher across the school. The department works well together, in part because its members bring different skills to the learning table. These skills are readily shared as the department works to develop models of best practice. The R.E. curriculum is rooted in Gospel teachings and values, uses the 'Icons' Religious Education programme of study, recommended by the Bishop of the Diocese, and is being fully implemented. Effective delivery of R.E. throughout the school is one reason behind the large number of students who continue the subject into A level. The school meets both the national and diocesan requirements for the allocation of curriculum time for taught R.E.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Prayer is at the centre of the school and the sense of awe and wonder in creation and learning are readily presented in lessons because of the high levels of pastoral engagement. Students have positive attitudes to each other and to adults so that social relationships are strong, especially because expectations are high and clear that we exist to help each other. Students have a strong sense of right and wrong and feel part of an ongoing quest to ensure that there is justice in the world around them. The school is a multi-cultural community and is looking at ways to enrich its provision by reference to students' rich cultural backgrounds and

heritage. Visits and visitors extend horizons and fundraising is linked well to international initiatives.

The school is accurate in its self-assessment and is working cohesively and continually to develop best practice in all areas of its work. Students benefit from strong pastoral systems which reinforce its academic standards and result in well-rounded individuals, able to more than hold their own in the world around them. The capacity for sustained improvement is very strong.

What needs to be improved?

- **Develop opportunities for students to consistently take the lead in learning in all classes through independent work and reporting back on their findings, including how and why they reached them.**
- **Enhance the central position of R.E. across the school by further development of cross-curricular links across subjects and through display.**
- **Continue work on assessment and self-assessment so students always know how to take their work to the next level and have the confidence to do so.**

The Inspectors endorse the areas identified by the school for improvement in the Section 48 Self-Evaluation Form.

St Bernard's High School is an outstanding Catholic school. Clear guidance from the headteacher, strong pastoral systems and well-defined expectations all help to ensure on-going improvement. The school is well supported by parents and carers and through its interaction with its surrounding parishes. It has a very strong capacity for continuing improvement.