



## **DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD**

### **Inspection Report**

**Name of School:** St Bernard's High School

**LEA:** Southend-on-Sea Unitary Authority

**Inspection Date:** 29<sup>th</sup> November 2017

**Reporting Inspector:** Peter Ward (Lead inspector)  
Damian Fox

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

**Type of School:** Secondary  
**School Category:** Academy  
**Age range of pupils:** 11 - 18  
**Gender of pupils:** Female  
**Number on roll:** 855  
**Appropriate Authority:** The Governing Board  
**Date of previous inspection:** October 2012

**School Address:**  
Milton Road  
Westcliff-on-Sea  
Essex  
SS0 7JS

**Tel. No.** 01702 343583  
**Headteacher:** Mr A. Sharpe  
**Chair of Governors:** Mr R. Calton

## **Information about the school** *para from previous s48 augmented from school & DfE data*

St Bernard's High School is a Catholic bi-lateral academy for girls with an open-access mixed sixth form. It is situated in Westcliff-on-Sea in the county of Essex in the diocese of Brentwood. The school is slightly smaller than the average-sized secondary school. The school is situated within the parish of Our Lady Help of Christians. It also serves the Catholic community worshipping in the 10 parishes within the Southend Deanery and students travelling from other parts of Essex and east London. The school has a significantly below average number of students eligible for Free School Meals. The school has a slightly above average number of students whose home language is not English.

### **Key grades for inspection**

1: Outstanding      2: Good      3: Requires Improvement      4: Inadequate

### **Overall**

### **Grade 1**

St Bernard's High School is an outstanding Catholic school, manifestly enabling its students to grow and flourish as full members of a Catholic Christian education community in which all are welcome. It recognises and celebrates its Bernadine heritage while pursuing its contemporary Catholic education mission.

The clear, realistic and purposeful leadership of the headteacher, working in concert with the school leadership team and supported appropriately by the Governing Board is successfully focused on promoting the integral education of each member of the school community by reason of its vibrant Catholic life.

Staff embrace this vision and help provide a wide range of opportunities for each pupil to develop their God-given talents and so prepare for adult life.

Students are introduced to this vision on their first contact with the school and come to increasingly share it as their engagement increases and become members of the school community. They benefit from the many opportunities to celebrate their faith and to serve their school community. During their school career they increasingly appreciate the implications of living out their personal faith through service to their neighbour, both near and far. Thus they live out the school's mission: "love one another as I have loved you". Excellent behaviour and relations between students and with staff also reflect this. There is a shared respect for the school environment which thoughtfully combines celebrating students' achievements with encouraging participation in school and community activities while marking its historical and contemporary links with the Church.

Religious Education is a particular strength of the school, reflecting its position as the core of the core curriculum in a Catholic school, and makes a positive contribution to the academic achievement of the school.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

Ensure that students consistently receive the most effective teaching. Further extend opportunities for students to grow spiritually and to develop as leaders in the contemporary world.

## **Outcomes for Students**

## **Grade 1**

Attainment and progress of students is outstanding, with very little variation between different groups of students due to pro-active monitoring and intervention by teachers. 86% of Year 11 students achieved GCSE Religious Studies grades A\*-C in 2017, slightly above the average for the last three years thus maintaining its position as one of the most successful subjects in the school. Its relative performance indicator is consistently above the national average. Performance at KS3 is equally strong with school data indicating 50% achieving Level 7 in Year 9. GCE AS and A Level are popular subjects, all 19 candidates achieving grades A\*-C at A Level in 2017. Throughout their school career students display an increasing grasp of religious literacy as a result of thoughtful teaching including clear and precise explanation of religious terms and language. Lesson observation in all key stages found that students are generally well motivated, keen to achieve and engage fully in the lessons. A review of books showed that the standards of students' work is generally at least good, with all students making progress from their baseline. Students confirmed that they knew the standard of their work and what they needed to do to make progress.

Students take full advantage of the many opportunities to develop the Catholic life of the school community, within and beyond the school. They recognise and act upon the Christian duty to 'love your neighbour'. Students clearly respond to the invitation – "if you want to" in the words of the school diary and the display panel - to organise events and arrange fundraising activities. During the Inspection a Year 8 pupil had organised a bake-sale at break and lunchtime in aid of Cancer Research UK while earlier in the week a Year 11 form with its tutor had held two lunchtime screenings of 'Beauty and the Beast' in support of 'Buzz Off Malaria'. Letters of thanks for recent contributions to a wide range of charities are prominently displayed. These events are in addition to the annual fundraising for Cafod, HARP Southend's homeless charity, and the local women's refuge along with the charities chosen annually to benefit from the Rag Week. One notable project is the long-standing support, initiated by one form but now supported by every class, to 'Educate a Girl – Empower a Woman'; currently this supports two young women, one in Swaziland and one in Uganda, having raised over £2500 to date. The fundraising total last year amounted to over £6500. Inspectors agree with the student statement on the school website that "endless opportunities involving leading and working with peers has developed my confidence as well as the ability to listen to the needs of others".

The extensive and well-planned programme of opportunities for prayer and worship enables students to grow in their understanding of liturgical celebration as a result of engaging in devising, preparing and leading as well as participating in different celebrations. Students undertake many roles of ministry including serving and reading at Mass, singing and music-making following appropriate training. This is also provided for Senior students and members of staff so that are able to serve as Eucharistic ministers. Mass is at the heart of the life of the school, the weekly Friday form Mass, with readings and bidding prayers selected by students, being celebrated in the beautiful former convent chapel. Similarly students are involved in the celebration of regular calendared Mass throughout the year, which include prayers of the faithful in the home languages of students so that over a period of years all languages have been included. During Lent sixth form liturgy leaders and house captains prepare and lead on reconciliation in every tutor group, students taking advantage of the opportunity to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation from a local

priest in the chapel on Fridays. Lent is the occasion of the Year 13 'Passion Mass' celebrated on the last day before the Easter holiday by the Dean and local clergy, with the Liturgy of the Word in the form of a drama of the trials, passion and death of Jesus, devised and written by students. Each year it is then celebrated in one of the local parishes. Among the many other liturgical celebrations led by students are the weekly stations of the cross on Fridays in Lent led by the student leadership team. Students are fully involved in devising and leading prayer and worship at assemblies. Every form has its liturgy prefect who promotes prayer and worship in the form group, overseeing the prayer focus and daily prayer when there is no assembly. Inspectors witnessed a Y8 liturgy prefect ensure that the rostered form member selected a prayer from the collection written by form members and lead the class in morning prayer most reverentially.

## **Leaders and Managers**

## **Grade 1**

A strong commitment to the integral education of the girls – and boys in the sixth form – in the Bernadine tradition is evident among leaders and managers at all levels. There is unequivocal and explicit evidence that the Catholic mission of the school is a priority along with the spiritual and moral development of the students. The headteacher has a clear strategic vision for and excellent understanding of the school, exemplified by the accurate and comprehensive denominational self-evaluation with its realistic action points. He works collaboratively with the senior leadership team and school staff to promote the human flourishing of all students through the vibrant Catholic life of the school and the academic achievement of all. Pastoral care is a particular strength of the school. Inspectors became aware of numerous examples of particular provision being made for students in a wide range of challenging circumstances. The inclusion of a wide range of useful school information together with prayers for all occasions in the students' diary illustrates the thoughtful approach of school leaders. The Governing Body undertakes regular training and informs itself of school life through the annual Governor Day as well as receiving regular reports, enabling it to discharge its responsibilities thoroughly and consciously. The annual review of the school self-evaluation document and regular review of the development plan further demonstrate the effective role of the governing body. The induction of new staff includes an introduction to the distinctive Catholic character of the school and the significance of celebrating its faith, the life of which serves to further enhance and reinforce this among all staff.

The role of school chaplain is undertaken by a local priest, aided by a retired priest, with the support of the teachers of Religious Education and the assistant headteacher who line manages the department. In this way the extensive liturgical and para-liturgical provision of the school is rooted in the life of the school community. Monitoring and evaluation of chaplaincy activities are robust and considered, in line with all school self-evaluation procedures, ensuring that they reflect the highest standards and continue to promote effectively the spiritual and religious development of students. It is reported to the governor's Ethos Committee by the headteacher who includes an update on Religious Education in his spirituality report.

Religious Education is very well led and managed: an excellent comprehensive department handbook, informs a well-qualified team of specialist Religious Education teachers. There is a good knowledge of the standard of teaching and a commitment

to consistent improvement through sharing good practice within the department and the school as a whole. Care is taken over the most appropriate timetabling of teachers and classes. The clear development plan draws on a good knowledge of students and staff informed by regular accurate tracking and monitoring, together with student evaluations. Students in Years 7-9 are taught in mixed ability tutor groups while in Years 10-11 they are taught in three sets in each half-year band. The department is well resourced and the three dedicated classrooms are well equipped with inter-active whiteboards. Students' work and key learning information is well displayed, making for attractive classrooms with a thoughtful prayer focus in each. As a result, outcomes in Religious Education are strong with students making above national average progress.

## **Provision**

## **Grade 1**

The quality of teaching is generally outstanding and never less than good. The best teaching is based on detailed lesson planning that is informed by accurate pupil assessment data. A good variety of tasks and consistent routines engage students and helps them improve their learning. Students feel confident to participate in the range of activities, supported by high quality video and other digital resources. They work independently, respond to teacher questions and engage with others in group tasks in order to master the stretching learning objectives. Teachers regularly monitor pupil progress in class using a variety of effective and engaging methods. In a Year 10 lesson on the problem of evil, the teacher readily engaged all the students through a good range of tasks and thoughtful questioning. Teachers generally display strong subject knowledge so that all teaching is good at imparting information accessibly but in some there could be greater attention at promoting thorough understanding and reflection. Behaviour is of a very high order, teachers modelling respect which is echoed by pupils.

The marking of students' work is consistent with regular assessments using the departmental marking criteria providing feedback and targets to students. Assessment uses Levels in Years 7-9, in line with the Curriculum Directory, and is also linked to the school's own assessment system. Regular half-termly assessments are carefully marked so that appropriate intervention and challenge may be provided to ensure students make the progress of which they are capable. There is an excellent set of schemes of work and wide range of teaching resources to promote students' learning.

Curriculum time devoted to Religious Education meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference. The curriculum has been reviewed and adapted to meet evolving contemporary students' needs. Changes have been carefully mapped to ensure that they continue to meet the requirements of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory. The diocesan-approved Icons course in Years 7-9 was developed two years ago with the purchase of the more recent 'Way, Truth and Life' programme and augmented by increased attention on scripture with a view to strengthening knowledge and understanding at GCSE. Hinduism is included in Year 7, Judaism in Year 8 and Islam in Year 9. Great care was taken in selecting the most appropriate GCSE Religious Studies specification to ensure that it addressed the concerns of students in a challenging manner. The school has chosen the new GCSE Religious Studies Edexcel specification with Judaism as the second religion, as required by the diocesan Bishop. Similar care was taken with selecting the GCE A Level specification, Edexcel being chosen to enable a New Testament text to be

studied. Sixth form General Religious Education follows a carousel programme through Year 12 and into Year 13, and includes visiting speakers from agencies including Cafod and Walsingham House. From Christmas half-term, all Year 13 students begin to prepare the Liturgy of the Word dramatisation of the 'Passion Mass'.

Prayer and worship are at the heart of the community life of the school with the school chapel and reservation of the Blessed Sacrament at its core. It is integral to the daily, weekly and annual cycle of school life for both students and staff. Weekly form Mass is complemented by regular celebrations of school Mass and for special groups including the Year 7 harvest festival Mass and Year 11 celebration Mass as well as for the local deanery and for past members of the school. The weekly cycle of assembly and form tutor prayer and worship includes weekly assembly for Year 7 in the nearby Catholic church. The regular cycle is augmented by many special celebrations marking the liturgical year. All are thoughtfully devised, reverently celebrated and respectfully attended, reflecting the commitment of all to the Catholic life of the school. Students who were not themselves Catholic told inspectors that they felt fully included in all aspects of the life of the school and that their faith or belief was respected.

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