

St Bernadette Catholic Secondary School

Fossedale Avenue, Whitchurch, Bristol BS14 9LS

Inspection dates

6–7 November 2018

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders, including governors, work together effectively. Although there was a dip in the examinations at the end of key stage 4 in 2017, the determination of leaders and good evaluation meant results improved in 2018.
- Leaders, including middle leaders, have secure systems and structures in place to check pupils' progress. Consequently, pupils are making better progress, and support is in place to help any pupil who falls behind.
- Middle leaders share well-researched theories to improve teaching. These collaborative measures are increasing the repertoire of teaching skills of colleagues. Pupils are benefiting from improved teaching as a result.
- Leaders have spent the pupil premium wisely. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils' progress is improving constantly. The difference in achievement between disadvantaged pupils and others in the school, and nationally, is diminishing speedily.
- The school is a calm and orderly place. Pupils are courteous, and polite to each other, staff and visitors.
- The implementation of the school's new behaviour management policy has decreased fixed-term exclusions significantly.
- Pupils respect the religious ethos of the school. They feel a part of the community, regardless of their own faith. They respect and understand leaders' expectations of them regarding British values.
- Safeguarding is effective in the school. The site is secure during the day. Pupils learn well about how to stay safe.
- Expectations of what pupils of middle ability and the most able pupils can achieve, including disadvantaged pupils, vary. There are too few of these pupils reaching the highest grades in the examinations at the end of key stage 4 currently.
- Attainment in mathematics has been below average for the last few years because of inconsistent and weaker teaching. A new head of mathematics was appointed in September 2018, but it is too soon to measure the impact of changes that have been made since her appointment.
- Leaders have made improvements to pupils' attendance, although it remains below the national average. There has been a reduction in persistent absence over the past few years. A new attendance officer was appointed in 2018. She is working with the families of the remaining pupils who fail to attend school regularly and is having some success.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Leaders, including governors, must ensure that:
 - pupils of middle ability and the most able pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, gain results at a high standard consistently
 - the teaching of mathematics is improved, so that pupils' progress and attainment in the subject improve rapidly
 - attendance improves, and persistent absence reduces to be at least in line with the national averages overall, and for pupil groups.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders, including governors, have high expectations of staff and pupils regarding achievement, behaviour and standards. The headteacher has introduced a 'wheel of excellence', with the child in the centre to support these values. Pupils and staff respect and accept the standards expected of them.
- The headteacher leads the senior and middle leaders well. She understands the value of shared leadership. She has devised effective systems and structures to support a continuous cycle of improvement within the school. School leaders embrace these and work together enthusiastically to ensure that pupils thrive and develop as confident and responsible future citizens.
- Leaders have a secure and realistic understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Sharp evaluation leads to incisive actions that improve the school continuously. An example of this is the improvements made between examination results in 2017 compared with 2018.
- Partnership work is benefiting leaders at every level. The school works with diocesan partners and Bristol local authority. Governors, leaders and pupils are gaining from the training undertaken on leadership.
- Leaders tackle weak subject leadership and weaker teaching as necessary. Teachers and middle leaders are held to account stringently through the school's appraisal system.
- Professional development of teachers is bespoke and based on tried and tested research. Every teacher adds to their teaching expertise to improve pupils' experiences and knowledge. Middle leaders share these tests, trials and research across the school. Although this is at an early stage, middle leaders and teachers can see the impact on improving pupils' progress.
- Leaders have sharpened the processes for tracking and checking pupils' achievement. Most teachers cater for individual pupils' needs well, although not so effectively in mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are making better progress.
- Leaders evaluate the curriculum regularly in the light of the changing demographic of the school population. Pupils in Year 9 study three new subjects before making choices for their GCSEs. This allows pupils to explore new subjects without the stress of examinations and improves sustainability following option choices. As a result, more pupils take the English Baccalaureate and achieve it.
- Pupils learn about the spiritual, moral, social and cultural curriculum through subjects daily. Leaders have undertaken an extensive audit to ensure that every area is covered in a meaningful way. Pupils' understanding of the relevance of this curriculum and the purpose of British values is well developed from Year 7 onwards. This richness and depth of learning provide a stable bedrock for pupils as they mature into young adults of the 21st century.

- There is an extensive range of extra-curricular opportunities for pupils, from sports events to learning Japanese. Currently, leaders do not check the registers of these clubs so there is no knowledge of whether disadvantaged pupils and other groups of pupils attend. This hinders some pupils from taking advantage of the full scope of experiences provided by the school.

Governance of the school

- Governors, especially the chair of the governing body, are effective.
- Governors oversee the spending of pupil premium, Year 7 catch-up and SEND funding well. Leaders responsible for using the funds are challenged at governors' meetings about the impact of actions taken. This is an effective accountability system.
- Governors have their own strategic plan and priorities to ensure that they hold leaders to account and maintain improvements.
- Governors have undertaken an audit of their skills and are undergoing training according to their needs and roles, in order to strengthen their leadership.
- Governors have requested two external reviews in the past two years as they want their practice to be the best. This reflective attitude is mirrored in the outward-facing style of school leadership too.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Governors and the leadership team have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of high quality. Staff are trained well on how to keep pupils safe from abuse, sexual exploitation and the influences of radicalisation and extremism. There is a specialist team that meets weekly to make sure that the increasing numbers of pupils with complex needs are safe and secure in school. The team works determinedly, yet sensitively, with pupils, parents and carers and external agencies to monitor and support the most vulnerable pupils. Safeguarding arrangements are secure and an integral part of the school's culture.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Since the dip in results in 2017, leaders have tightened the practices for reviewing teaching. Middle leaders receive effective training on how to monitor teaching and learning. As a result, good teaching is more consistent across the school and pupils are making better progress.
- The new leaders for English and mathematics are working together to inform parents of pupils in Years 7 and 8 about the successes of, or concerns about, their children. This extra level of communication is helping pupils to make a good start to their academic education in the school. In addition, it reinforces the standards expected, so that progress improves.

- Pupils in key stage 3 develop oracy skills through the 'soap-box challenge' and public debating. These experiences provide pupils with confidence in presentational skills and improve their elocution and articulation.
- Most teachers question effectively and challenge pupils' thinking and knowledge. Many subjects use controversial topics to engender debate on moral and topical issues. This supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding in a relevant way.
- Homework is different and varied in subjects. Much is available online, which allows pupils to access it in a range of locations, as well as at home. Also, parents are aware of what is being set and teachers monitor its completion. This allows for effective and swift intervention when homework is incomplete or misunderstood.
- Teachers are responsible for managing the needs of individual pupils. Their comprehensive notes, sensitive seating plans and assessment information provide a detailed record of individual pupil progress. This information is shared with parents, leaders and staff. Therefore, there is a constant and seamless transition of information, as required, which benefits a pattern of improvement.
- Parents receive detailed reports annually, which provide personal, social and academic information. On another three occasions in the academic year, parents receive an update on how pupils are progressing towards their targets and what their attitudes to learning are like. Parents are well informed and invited to speak or contact staff as necessary. Leaders encourage home links.
- Pupils whose literacy and numeracy skills are not at age-related expectations in Year 7 are given suitable opportunities and support to catch up. These pupils re-integrate into mainstream learning within the academic year. Staff monitor their progress and provide additional support when needed.
- The leader of literacy has introduced school-wide enhancement of vocabulary needed in different subjects. Pupils work on this in every subject and year group, which supports their extended writing and oracy work. As yet, there is no comprehensive policy on checking the basic English skills of pupils in their written work, so some pupils continue to make errors.
- Most teachers extend pupils of middle ability and the most able pupils so that they reach the highest standards. However, there are some instances when low expectations mean that pupils' work is incomplete and untidy and hinders their learning. This is more noticeable among older pupils than younger pupils.
- Some of the most able younger pupils are not challenged in their learning because of poor planning by some teachers.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are confident and comfortable in their lessons. They ask questions politely when they are unsure of anything.

- Pupils are very respectful of each other. They are willing to listen to a range of views and opinions.
- Pupils receive good careers guidance from Year 7 onwards. Employers visit the school regularly, so pupils learn about local and national employment from an early age. This helps them make correct subject choices when choosing their options. Leaders target pupils for extra career guidance when necessary. In addition, pupils visit higher education institutions, such as universities, so that pupils know about post-18 opportunities as well.
- Pupils learn, in a thorough and meaningful way, how to keep themselves safe emotionally, in their health and online through personal, social, health and economic education and other subjects.
- Pupils are aware of the different types of bullying and they know to whom to turn if they have any issues or worries about their safety. Despite a couple of parental concerns raised through the online facility, pupils spoke confidently of how staff deal effectively with bullying on the rare occasions that it happens.
- Leaders and staff are vigilant about the welfare of pupils. This is reflected in the harmonious atmosphere that pervades the school.
- A few pupils lack pride in their work or uniform, but these are the minority. Leaders regularly and consistently challenge these attitudes.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Leaders introduced a new behaviour management policy 18 months ago. Although there was a spike in sanctions and fixed-term exclusions initially, the impact is tangible now. Low-level disruption in most lessons is non-existent. Staff and pupils alike appreciate the difference that it has made. Teachers spoke of gaining 15 minutes' learning time in each lesson because of the consistent application of the school's new policy. Inevitably, this helps pupils make better progress.
- Pupils arrive at school equipped and ready for learning. Movement between lessons is purposeful.
- Pupils respond well to instructions and are very obedient.
- Leaders have good relationships with schools in the locality. When pupils' behaviour is a serious cause for concern, there are systems, overseen by the local authority, that allow pupils to have a fresh start in a new school. Similarly, pupils enter the school on a trial basis from other local schools. In most cases, this is successful and avoids permanent exclusions.
- Although attendance and persistent absence are below and not in line with national averages, leaders are not complacent. They work tirelessly with the attendance officer, the local community and the few families involved to explain the importance of education and the negative impact that non-attendance can have on pupils' progress.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- In 2018, pupils made progress in line with the national average in most subjects in the examinations at the end of key stage 4. This was because of intensive work undertaken by middle leaders to make sure that pupils were well prepared for the new specifications required by the examinations.
- Leaders and middle leaders discuss any pupils who are falling behind. Teachers analyse issues of concern through shared conversations. From this, teachers try positive strategies to improve learning in their areas if an individual pupil's progress is declining.
- Disadvantaged pupils are making better progress in current year groups and in most subjects. Teachers are aware of their needs and are adapting teaching accordingly.
- Pupils with SEND make good progress. Teaching assistants have received valuable training to make sure that they have the skills to support these pupils. Work is in progress to enable more teachers to have these skills too.
- School leaders have made reading a focus to improve the literacy levels, vocabulary and cultural understanding of every pupil. Pupils read for 100 minutes a week in tutor time and in a range of subjects. Tutors and teachers of English encourage pupils to recognise the worth of reading. This work complements the oracy focus within the lower school too. As a result, pupils are showing a greater range of vocabulary in their work.
- Pupils are well prepared for their next steps in education in English, science and most foundation subjects. Recent training in humanities has improved pupils' progress in history and geography.
- Pupils have not made good progress in mathematics. The expectations of some teachers have been too low. Work has not been set at the right level or built effectively on prior learning. As a result, standards in mathematics are too low.

School details

Unique reference number	109331
Local authority	Bristol
Inspection number	10047659

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	723
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Peter Bradshaw
Headteacher	Basia McLaughlin
Telephone number	0117 377 2050
Website	www.stberns.bristol.sch.uk
Email address	info@stberns.bristol.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	13–14 November 2014

Information about this school

- This school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. It is a Roman Catholic school and part of the Clifton Diocese.
- The school is working in partnership with Bristol local authority and St Mary's Redcliffe teaching school.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium funding is in line with the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is in line with the national average and, for those who have an education, health and care plan, is above the national average.
- A section 48 inspection took place at the school on 11 and 12 May 2016.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited lessons, jointly with senior leaders.
- A wide sample of pupils' work was scrutinised.
- Inspectors talked with groups of pupils from key stages 3 and 4, as well as with other pupils informally across the site.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders and members of the governing body.
- Telephone calls were made to the headteacher of St Mary's Redcliffe and the school improvement partner for Clifton Diocese.
- Documentary and other types of information were evaluated, including evidence relating to safeguarding, assessment and school evaluation.
- Inspectors took account of the 33 responses and 27 comments on the online Parent View survey, the 41 responses to the online pupil survey and the 49 responses to the online staff survey.

Inspection team

Kathy Maddocks, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Matthew Collins	Ofsted Inspector
Jacqui Goodall	Ofsted Inspector
Stuart Wilson	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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