

Blessed William Howard Catholic High School

Rowley Avenue, Stafford, ST17 9AB

Inspection dates

9–10 October 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils	Good		2
Quality of teaching	Good		2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good		2
Leadership and management	Good		2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Achievement is rising rapidly, and the 2012 results were the school's best ever.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs do well because of increasingly good support and guidance.
- Teachers convey high expectations. They keep a careful check on students' progress and set challenging targets for them.
- Students are safe and bullying is very rarely an issue. Behaviour and attendance are good.
- Good leadership ensures that the whole school community shares a strong and clear vision for its future.
- In the main school, the way leaders check the quality of teaching and follows this up with training has had a good impact on rising standards.
- The governors support the school's leaders well in bringing about improvements in teaching and achievement.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The sixth form requires improvement.
- Despite the successes elsewhere in the school, some students still struggle at AS level, and too few gain top grades at A level.
- Leaders do not have sufficient information to keep a close check on the quality of education for sixth-form students, particularly when they are taught on other sites.
- Teachers do not always give students enough opportunities to develop their own thoughts and ideas in lessons, and this sometimes restricts their achievement.

Information about this inspection

- During the inspection a total of 35 lessons were observed, taught by 35 different teachers, amounting to 17.5 hours of inspection time. Inspectors looked at samples of students' work and looked at their books during lessons.
- Meetings and discussions were held with senior leaders, teachers, pupils, parents and carers, and with representatives of the governing body, the local authority and the diocese.
- Inspectors considered the 118 responses to the online Parent View survey, plus several letters, telephone messages and emails from parents, together with the responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including data on students' progress, monitoring, schemes of work, self-assessment and improvement planning, and a range of policies and procedures, including those for safeguarding.

Inspection team

Martyn Groucott, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Jane Gaffney	Additional Inspector
Robin Sidaway	Additional Inspector
Thelma McIntosh-Clark	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-sized comprehensive school.
- The proportion of students supported at school action is above average, while the proportion who are supported at school action plus or by a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The proportion of students who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium is below average.
- Students from minority ethnic communities form a smaller proportion of the total than that found typically, and the proportion who speak English as an additional language is low.
- The school meets the current government floor targets, which set the minimum expectations for students' progress and achievement.
- Sixth-form education is provided as part of a borough-wide consortium that includes the other high schools and Stafford College.
- The school is designated as a specialist arts college and has been awarded the Artsmark Gold award three times for 'outstanding contribution to arts education' by the Arts Council.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teaching is outstanding by:
 - extending opportunities for students to assess the quality of their own work and that of their classmates
 - improving the balance between teacher-led and student-based activities in all lessons
 - increasing opportunities for students to undertake learning and research on their own.
- Raise achievement further by:
 - ensuring that progress is equally good across all subject areas
 - developing the current focus on individual support and guidance in Key Stage 3, so that all students benefit
 - improving the use of tracking data in the sixth form to ensure provision is effective and progress maximised across all sites in the consortium.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- The achievement of students has shown rapid and sustained improvement, so that in successive inspections the school has moved from requiring improvement to satisfactory and now to good.
- The systematic drive to raise standards is bearing fruit and students' work shows they are achieving well, although achievement in some subject areas is not as high as in others. In the summer 2012 GCSE examinations 75% of the students gained five A*–C passes including English and mathematics, and at A-level there was a 100% pass rate.
- Taking their starting points into account, the proportions of students making and exceeding nationally-expected rates of progress are better than average. Teachers use information on students' progress to set challenging targets, and review this information for every student they teach every six weeks. Teachers are held to account for the performance of everyone they teach.
- However, in the sixth form, the use of data is much less well developed. It is not always used to measure the effectiveness of provision or track progress, and this contributes to failure rates in AS-level examinations being too high and not enough students getting the highest grades in their A-level papers.
- Students have opportunities to read widely and often, although they are not always encouraged to read systematically across all subjects. They generally develop a secure range of key skills in reading, writing, communication and mathematics.
- Provision for disabled students and those who have special educational needs has also improved since the last inspection, resulting in sustained improvement in learning for these groups that has narrowed the gap between their attainment and that of other students.
- The school has started to provide additional support and guidance in Key Stage 3 to further improve learning and support better standards higher up the school, although the process is still in its early days.
- The school carefully monitors reading and spelling ages and has introduced strategies to support weaker readers, including better use of phonics (the recognition of sounds and letters), reading aloud and the development of a reading log of reading at home. A computer-based reading scheme is used to track individual progress very carefully and to set challenging improvement targets.
- The progress made by students whose circumstances may make them particularly vulnerable is also carefully tracked so they too receive good support and achieve well. Funding gained through the pupil premium is used well top help students who need additional support, for example through the recent development of a mentoring programme and a nurture group.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is generally good, including in English and mathematics, and a significant amount is outstanding. This underpins rising attainment and positive outcomes for all groups of students.

- Students on the whole enjoy their learning and are fully engaged. In part this is because teachers demonstrate a strong rapport with them, but also because the activities they plan in lessons are generally effective in helping to develop a wide range of skills, so students' knowledge and understanding are developed in ways they find interesting and challenging.
- The withdrawal of identified students in Key Stage 3 at least once a week for six-week intensive support programmes in literacy or numeracy is starting to improve standards in these subject areas. Teaching assistants provide good related support in class, collaborating effectively with teachers.
- Teachers have high expectations and maintain a very good understanding of students' ongoing performance, setting challenging individual targets to maximise achievement. Careful lesson planning takes individual needs into account. Sometimes, in less effective lessons, there is too much reliance on whole-class activities that are dominated by the teacher, and this prevents students from developing their initiative and ability work on their own.
- In the best lessons teachers are skilled at asking questions that enable students to develop their ideas and reinforce understanding. Many teachers enable students to undertake individual research and promote their understanding by giving opportunities for them to evaluate the quality of their own and each other's work, but this is not yet routine practice across the school.
- Teaching and the curriculum in the sixth form are sometimes good, but teachers are sometimes constrained by not having access to the same level of accurate and timely data on progress and achievement that is available in the main school.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Behaviour in and around school, including in the sixth form, is generally good. Occasionally some students are a little boisterous, and when lessons are not brisk or demanding enough there is occasionally a small amount of silly behaviour.
- Parents and carers generally agree that behaviour and safety are good and they express few concerns, preferring to mention the strong ethos and caring community within the school.
- Students mostly enjoy school and so their attendance is good. The school works hard to engage with a small number of families whose children are frequent absentees.
- Students have a good understanding of bullying in its various forms, but say that this is rarely a problem and when there have been incidents they have been dealt with effectively. Students, their parents and carers, and staff all believe that this is a safe environment, and that students are helped and encouraged to live safely.
- The school has a strong atmosphere of respect and courtesy. All staff and students have a positive approach to relationships and appreciate the need to get on with each other. Such positive social attitudes are one reason why the number of exclusions has declined significantly since the last inspection.

The leadership and management are good

- The sustained improvement achieved by the school over time reflects the vision and dynamism of its leaders. Leadership roles have been shared out more and are now far less concentrated in a few hands. A much more collaborative, team-based approach is committed to sustaining

improvement. Staff take pride in the developments that have taken place and share high expectations and ambition.

- Over time the local authority has supported the school effectively, at one point offering considerable input including training and support. Now that the school has moved forward so strongly, it provides only 'light touch' help.
 - The school's systems for checking on the quality of teaching are thorough and effective in supporting better practice and rising standards. However, they are not yet fully refined because they do not fully link the quality of teaching closely enough to progression through teachers' pay scales.
 - The school promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. This is reflected in the ways in which the arts affect so much of school life, and in the opportunities students are given to reflect on their own lives and those of others when on residential 'retreats'.
 - The school assesses its own performance accurately, and uses the results to provide the right priorities when drawing up plans for improvement. Prudent financial management ensures that funding is used well to support such initiatives, such as the current development of information and communication technology throughout the school.
 - The school's links with parents and carers are good. Those with other institutions in the consortium help to broaden the range of courses available to sixth formers. However, current weaknesses in these arrangements mean that the school is not sufficiently aware of the progress made by some of its sixth-form students.
- **The governance of the school:**
- is able to provide strong support and challenge because it uses the good range of skills and expertise among its members well to help direct strategic planning, and to be effective partners in supporting improvement
 - is aware of how well additional funding is spent, such as the pupil premium
 - fulfils its statutory duties, particularly those relating to safeguarding and equality of opportunity.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	124455
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	402259

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	836
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	163
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Robert Love
Headteacher	Philip Smith
Date of previous school inspection	10 May 2010
Telephone number	01785 244236
Fax number	01785 244236
Email address	headteacher@blessedwilliamhoward.staffs.sch.uk

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