

The Bishop Bell Church of England Mathematics and Computing Specialist School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114613
Local Authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	311661
Inspection dates	3–4 October 2007
Reporting inspector	David Butler HMI

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1023
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	G Rideout
Headteacher	Terry Boatwright
Date of previous school inspection	13 October 2003
School address	Priory Road Eastbourne BN23 7EJ
Telephone number	01323 465403
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Age group	11-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors

Description of the school

The Bishop Bell Mathematics and Computing Specialist School is the only Church of England secondary school in East Sussex. Most students live in the local community, with about 12% coming from further afield. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is close to the national average. There are few students from minority ethnic groups or who have English as an additional language. The number of students at the school has increased substantially since the last inspection.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Bishop Bell is a good and improving school with several outstanding features. Inspectors agree with the view of the great majority of parents who feel it is doing a very good job in educating and caring for their children. The Christian ethos of the school is reflected in its strong pastoral care and its emphasis on developing tolerance and understanding between students. The school's work in promoting equal opportunities to ensure all students make successful progress is outstanding. The school's specialist status for mathematics and computing has made a major contribution to raising standards and achievement through the provision of better resources and improvements to the curriculum. The school works extremely effectively with primary schools, post-16 providers, local businesses and external support agencies to support students' learning and personal development.

The good achievement of students is due to effective teaching and the high-quality individual support they receive. Improvements to the curriculum, particularly in the provision of vocational education, have also played a significant part in raising achievement through meeting the learning needs and career aspirations of students. GCSE results have risen each year for the past ten years and are amongst the highest in East Sussex. Students achieve particularly well in mathematics but there is underachievement in science, particularly by students with average levels of attainment. While most teaching is generally good, inspectors observed a few lessons that were uninspiring and failed to engage students sufficiently in learning. In these lessons, students became bored and this resulted in some misbehaviour. Inspectors also observed some very good lessons, which motivated and excited students' interest in learning.

Students' great enjoyment of school is reflected in their high levels of attendance and their generally good attitudes to learning. Students feel that the school is safe and friendly and that teachers and other staff are very caring and supportive. Year 7 students told inspectors that they had settled into their new school very easily and many had rapidly made new friends. Students have a good understanding of how to lead safe and healthy lives. Substantial numbers of students are involved in helping to run activities in school and in the local community. Many older students exercise responsibility, for example, through the prefect system and providing support for younger students. Students are well prepared for further education, training and employment.

The headteacher, senior leaders and governors provide very clear direction and manage the school very effectively. They have a good understanding of the strengths and weakness of the school, have demonstrated they are fully capable of bringing about improvement and have ambitious plans for the future. With the exception of achievement in science, good progress has been made in the areas for development identified in the last inspection report and in other important aspects of the school's work. The school is very well placed to become even better in the future.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and achievement in science by students with average levels of attainment.
- Ensure lessons are as interesting as possible and consistently engage students fully in learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students achieve well and attain good standards in national tests and public examinations. Students enter the school with average levels of prior attainment. They make satisfactory progress in Years 7 to 9. Progress in Years 10 and 11 is very good. The proportion of students attaining five or more A* to C grade passes in GCSE, or equivalent qualifications, is well above the national average and in line with it when English and mathematics are included. Unconfirmed data for 2007 indicate a further improvement in GCSE results, including a significant increase in the proportion of students attaining grades A* to C grades in both English and mathematics. Achievement across Years 7 to 11 is excellent in mathematics. Following recent improvements, achievement in English is satisfactory but some underachievement remains in science, particularly by students who have average levels of attainment. The school sets appropriately ambitious targets and is making good progress towards meeting them. This includes the challenging targets associated with the school's specialist designation for mathematics and computing, which is making a significant contribution to raising standards and achievement across the school. There is no evidence of underachievement by any particular group of students. Very good support enables students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to achieve well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students have a good understanding of how to lead healthy lives. The school recently achieved the Healthy School Award and has also been awarded the Sports Mark and Football Association Charter Mark. Students develop their fitness through at least two hours of physical education each week and many join in extra-curricular sporting activities. Students are made well aware of the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse and of other threats to their health through a strong programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE). Students feel very safe and the rare instances of bullying and other forms of harassment are dealt with effectively when they are brought to the notice of teachers. Students feel confident that they have the skills they need to progress to further education, training and employment.

The school council is rightly proud of the improvements it has helped bring about, for example, in the canteen. Many Year 11 students are prefects and take their responsibilities seriously, for example, acting as 'buddies' to younger ones. The school takes account of students' views, for example, about curriculum changes, which are gathered through regular questionnaires and focus groups. Students are also involved in the appointment of staff, including asking some very astute questions in the recent interviews for the position of school chaplain.

Attendance is well above average, reflecting students' enjoyment in coming to school. Behaviour is generally good around school but in a few lessons, usually where teaching does not engage students sufficiently, there is some misbehaviour, which distracts students from learning. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Their understanding of different cultures is helped through the valuable links the school has developed with communities in Africa and India. Students' good contribution to the community is further demonstrated by the way many of them are involved in raising funds for a variety of charities, as well as supporting activities in the local community. A small group of students is involved in the promotion of sustainable development.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers have good knowledge of their subjects and the requirements of examination courses. Lessons are generally well planned, involve a variety of activities and use a range of resources, including interactive whiteboards and other modern technologies. The objectives of lessons are shared with students, although plenary sessions do not always focus sufficiently on how those objectives have been achieved. Marking is thorough and students receive good feedback on how to improve their work. In the more successful lessons, students are motivated to learn through being set stimulating and appropriately challenging tasks that require them to think for themselves. Inspectors also observed a few lessons where teaching was uninspiring and failed to engage students fully in learning. In these lessons, teachers spend too much time talking, allowing insufficient time for students to explore issues for themselves, consolidate their understanding and reflect on what they have learned. There is a good programme of professional development for teachers and other staff, based on needs identified through the school's self-evaluation. There are limited opportunities for teachers to observe good practice across subjects but appropriate plans are now in place to extend these.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is well planned and effectively meets the needs of students. Improvements made to the curriculum since the last inspection, particularly the developments in vocational education, have had a major impact on increasing students' engagement and raising achievement. In Years 10 and 11, students benefit from an excellent range of academic and vocational options, many of which are provided in conjunction with local colleges and work-based learning providers. A varied programme of enrichment and extra-curricular activities contributes valuably to students' enjoyment, achievement and personal development. The school's specialism in mathematics and computing has enriched the curriculum and improved resources for information and communication technology (ICT). The provision for citizenship education, which was an action point in the previous inspection, is now delivered satisfactorily within the PSHE programme, although some aspects, such as the European Union, are still not covered in sufficient depth. Imaginative use is made of suspended timetable days to enrich the opportunities available to learners, for example, through taking part in enterprise activities. Primary headteachers value highly the support the school is providing in mathematics and ICT in their schools. An imaginative development has been the very successful provision of advanced apprenticeships through the school's nursery and ICT training centre.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support provided for students is a strength in the school. Many parents of Year 7 students commented very favourably on how rapidly their children had settled into their new school. There are good systems in place, particularly in Years 10 and 11, to track both the academic and social development of students, and appropriate interventions are made when difficulties are identified. Older students are aware of their targets and what they need to do to reach them, but this is less true of younger students. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are given very good support to help them achieve well. Liaison with external

support agencies, such as the educational psychologists and social work service and welfare officers, is strong. Child protection systems are fully in place. The school works very closely with parents and keeps them well informed about their children's progress. Students are given good support in making their option choices and in making decisions about future education, training and employment.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher, senior managers and governors provide strong and clear direction for the work of the school. The day-to-day running of the school is efficient and effective. Staff are fully committed to the values of the school and work hard to ensure that students do their best and are well cared for. Excellent monitoring systems are in place to make sure all students are treated equally and given the support they need.

The school knows its strengths and weaknesses well because it has good procedures in place to evaluate its work. This draws on the views of students, parents and staff, as well as data on students' performance and observations of lessons. The evidence gathered from this enables the school to set clear targets for improvement and put appropriate plans in place to achieve them. Subject leaders are held increasingly accountable for the work of their departments. The quality of their plans to bring about improvement are not always specific enough or focused sufficiently on their intended impact on students' achievement.

Resources are deployed efficiently and finances are well managed, although the governors have yet to meet the Financial Management Standard in School. Nevertheless, governance is strong. Governors are very supportive, have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and are prepared to ask challenging questions about the school's performance. The school has made effective use of the additional funding for its mathematics and computing specialism to promote achievement in the school and in the wider community.

Good progress has been made since the last inspection. Standards and achievement have continued to rise and the school has met the great majority of its targets, including those for its specialism. Better use is now being made of assessment information to improve teaching and learning. Considerable improvements have taken place in the curriculum, particularly in vocational education. The provision for citizenship education is now satisfactory. The achievement of boys has risen and is now similar to that of girls. Difficulties in staffing and the match of middle-attaining students to specific courses have contributed to some underachievement in science. Steps are being taken to tackle both these concerns but they have yet to impact on results.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

5 October 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Bishop Bell Church of England Mathematics and Computing Specialist School,
Eastbourne, East Sussex BN23 7EJ

We enjoyed our visit to your school and would like to thank all of you who helped us during the inspection. I would like to share some of our findings with you.

We think Bishop Bell is a good school with several outstanding features. You achieve well because teaching is good and you are very well cared for and supported. Many of you told us that you really enjoy school, find it friendly and feel safe. We agree with these views. Your attendance is excellent and your personal development is very good. You generally get on well with each other and behave well around the school but minor disruption in a few lessons gets in the way of your learning. Those of you who are new to the school value the help you are given, especially from Year 11 students. You are well aware of how to lead safe and healthy lifestyles. You played an important part in bringing about the improvements in school meals and the café. Many of you take part in extra-curricular activities, particularly sport. You benefit from having a very good choice of subjects in Year 10. We feel you are well prepared for life after you leave school. Your school is very well led and managed and it is making good use of the extra funds it receives for its mathematics and computing status. One of the major strengths of your school is the way it works with primary schools, colleges, local businesses and other agencies to support your education.

We have suggested some improvements to make your school even better.

- Results and achievement by some of you in science need to improve.
- Some of your lessons could be more interesting and involve you more actively, so that you are better motivated to learn.

We hope you will play your part in helping your school to improve further and wish you every success in the future.

David Butler Her Majesty's Inspector



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