

Report of the Denominational (Section 48) Inspection Carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

St Benedict's Catholic School
Beeton's Way, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk IP32 6RH
Telephone: 01284753512
e-mail address: office@st-benedicts.suffolk.sch.uk

URN: 124861
DCSF No: 9354600

For the Catholic Diocese of East Anglia



Headteacher: Mr P Rossi

Chair of Governors: Mrs M Smith

Date of inspection: 24th January 2008

Reporting Inspector: Miss F G Matthew

Copyright

1998 Copyright – Diocese of East Anglia

This report may be reproduced in whole, or in part, provided that the source and its date are stated. However, it may not be used, in or in connection with, a prospectus or an advertisement or for any commercial purpose.

Copy of this Report may be obtained from the Governors of the School.

Description of School

St Benedict's Catholic School, Bury St Edmunds is a 13 – 18 co-educational voluntary aided comprehensive school in the Diocese of East Anglia, situated in the Suffolk education authority. The school has been designated as a specialist Maths and Computing college since 2004. The school serves a large catchment area covering the parishes of Brandon, Bury St Edmunds, Clare, Diss, Haverhill, Newmarket, Stowmarket, Sudbury and Thetford. Pupils are admitted according to the Governors' admissions criteria and not on the basis of location or ability. The school intake at Year 9 has fallen in recent years following the withdrawal of free Home-School transport but it rose markedly to 150 in September 2007. Children are welcomed from other Christian denominations as well as from other faith backgrounds when places permit. The Year 9 intake each year largely comes from St Louis Middle School. There are 559 pupils including 146 in the Sixth Form. 77% are Catholic. The proportion of ethnic minority groups is slightly below average with 84% being from white British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is low. 43 pupils have special educational needs and 10 have a statement of such need. Prior attainment on entry to the school is above average and pupil mobility is below average. The majority of pupils continue their education in the Sixth Form after their GCSE examinations.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

St Benedict's Catholic School is an outstanding Catholic School. The Catholic life of the school benefits from inspirational leadership from the Head Teacher and he is well supported by the leadership team and Governors. There is a strong sense of purpose within the school which has resulted in St Benedict's being a living Christian community where effective learning takes place and where Christ is recognised in the daily work. There is a shared commitment to the Catholic ethos by all in the school. Relationships between pupils and with staff are excellent and are firmly based on respect and trust. There are high expectations of self discipline and pupils conduct themselves well in classrooms and beyond. St Benedict's is a welcoming, caring school and there is a spirit of co-operation, loyalty and friendliness to which all contribute. Pastoral care is a great strength and is structured and effective. Pupils feel respected, valued and listened to and student voice is loud. Excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural developments are evident in Religious Education as well as in other curricular and extra curricular activities. Standards of achievement and of teaching and learning in Religious Education are excellent. The curriculum is well planned and the department benefits from outstanding leadership and teamwork.

Grade 1

Improvement since the last inspection

There have been significant improvements since the last inspection. A wide range of learning experiences are now included in the RE scheme of work, including activities that develop thinking skills and reflectiveness. Continuing work is done to provide for students with additional needs and students have school target grades from assessment data which are monitored in tests. The department has a projector in Room 13, and another for Room 9 is planned, as well as E beam. The RE scheme of work now includes ICT tasks, especially for homeworks. The time

allocation for RE has increased to 10% in Key Stage 4 and now meets the requirement of the Bishops' Curriculum Directory. In Key Stage 3 the time allocation has risen slightly from below 6.5% to 7% and the shortfall continues to be addressed. The RE handbook has been developed and is available both in the staff shared area of the intranet and a hard copy in Room 9 along with schemes of work and lesson plans. The Head of Department is involved in lesson observation and feedback for Performance Management. The students' experience of prayer and collective worship has been well developed since the last inspection. A detailed weekly prayer sheet is provided for all tutors and year heads offering a weekly theme, readings and prayers and a focal point is provided through a prayer candle and object in a 'prayer box' for each tutor group. Prayer is naturally included in RE lessons and at other times. Year heads and the whole staff have received inset on prayer and collective worship and PD days often include modelling of an act of worship. The Head of RE and SLT continue to monitor acts of worship as detailed in the current school improvement plan.

Grade 1

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop

There is outstanding capacity for the school to improve and develop further. The school is a reflective, questioning and self evaluating community and this allows it to assess its strengths and areas for improvement accurately. Careful, detailed and thorough self-evaluation is evident. There is an ethos of continuing improvement and the sustaining of improvement through collaborative CPD and complacency is not part of the culture of the school. Self-evaluation and planning constantly seek further improvement and identify ways forward. There is a strong senior leadership team; distributed leadership is encouraged and the challenge responded to by middle leaders who are given opportunities for leadership training; the governing body provides strong and stable support. The Head Teacher has a clear vision for the future development of the school which is shared with staff, governors, parents and pupils.

Grade 1

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to move towards establishing a school Chapel
- Enhance the chaplaincy provision by working towards appointing a lay chaplain
- Continue to look for opportunities to increase the classroom time for Religious Education to 10% in Key Stage 3
- Increase student involvement in acts of worship
- Develop the use of assessment levels at Key Stage 3 in Religious Education
- Develop the use of 'Assessment for Learning' including peer assessment in Religious Education

The Catholic Life of the School

Leadership and Management

Leadership and management are strengths of the school. The leadership of the Head Teacher is outstanding and his team and Governors provide dedicated and committed support to develop the Catholic ethos of the school and to secure improvements. The Head Teacher and senior team are effective in introducing and managing change. There is a clear, spiritual and well articulated

vision of the purpose of the school and the mission statement serves to underpin and drive the daily work. Governors are actively involved in the Catholic life of the school and provide appropriate support and challenge in an atmosphere of trust and openness. They are respected by staff. Suitable opportunities have been taken for staff training on collective worship and prayer. There is a shared sense of responsibility among staff who are empowered and encouraged to run with ideas and initiatives. Spiritual and moral development of pupils is highly important in the school and is rooted in the school's ethos of valuing and respecting individuals at all levels. St Benedict's has good links with parents, parishes and the local community including feeder schools, the diocese and outside agencies. Staff of the pyramid schools prepare a joint Advent service and pilgrimage to Walsingham. Good working relationships exist with a number of organisations actively involved in areas of the school's work, for example through work experience placements, community service and Bury Christian Youth. There is a very strong tradition of charity work undertaken by students of St Benedict's, largely led by sixth formers. This includes a 'covenant with the poor,' prominent Lenten alms projects, a Peace and Justice group and a Christian Union group. Students provide Christmas hampers, Samaritan's Purse Christmas boxes and the school is used for a lunch on Christmas day for people who would otherwise be alone. Pupils are appreciative of the opportunities they are given to 'be effective Christians in the modern world' as the Mission statement says.

Grade 1

The Sacramental and Prayer Life of the School

Prayer and worship are woven into the life of the school. Tutor time prayer observed during the inspection was well organised and beautifully pitched to be meaningful and relevant to the students. It was well developed and reflective, giving pupils time to engage fully. Tutors are well supported by the Head of RE in leading prayers in daily tutor time in relevant and meaningful ways, and pupils respond well. The Head of RE plans prayer themes and materials thoroughly and communicates well with form tutors and she plans the programme for whole school assemblies. Prayers are invariably said in Religious Education lessons and assist in pupils' spiritual development. Prayer is an essential element in staff briefings and other meetings. Mass is celebrated regularly and each tutor group has their own Mass each year, for which they are well prepared. The whole school celebrates Mass on Holy Days of Obligation and St Benedict's day. Collective worship makes a good contribution to the spiritual and moral growth of the pupils. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is made available to students in Advent and Lent. Three priest chaplains are assigned to specific year groups, although the sickness of two of them has meant their presence in the school recently has been curtailed. There is a progressive programme of liturgical formation. The school plans to form a liturgy group of staff and students to plan Liturgies. The art department has produced some wonderful art work to enhance the setting for worship in art lessons and art club. The school is aiming to further develop the use of the prayer room.

Grade 2

How well the school promotes community cohesion

St Benedict's promotes community cohesion in an outstanding way in line with its Catholic ethos. The Head Teacher gives a strong lead and is supported by his leadership team and the governors. Among the acknowledged characteristics of a St Benedict's leaver are 'a deep respect for all human beings' and 'an awareness of the needs of others and a willingness to help wherever possible.' St Benedict's Medium term School Development Plan articulates: 'The Every Child Matters agenda is the Catholic School agenda. It may now be accepted across society but it has always been at the heart of what we are about. The 'preference for the poor' has always been

fundamental to Catholic education. Whilst striving for excellence we must not reject those all too often rejected.' The programme for collective worship is integrated with the Catholic Church's liturgical year, but is also flexible and all can access it. Assemblies encourage students to appreciate others' beliefs and values. The school is socially inclusive providing equality of access for all pupils. The inclusion of all learners is a central goal based on the school's belief that all are created in the image of God. The RE curriculum promotes community cohesion effectively through a study of Islam in Year 9, aspects of the Key Stage 4 syllabus and in the post 16 General RE course. Diversity is celebrated through subject Schemes of Work and especially in Multicultural week and Languages Day.

Grade 1

Religious Education

Achievement and Standards in Religious Education

The standards learners achieve in Religious Education are very high given their capability and starting points. Standards in RE have been improving for the past 9 years and have been consistently over 80% A-C at GCSE for 6 years with a substantial percentage receiving A and A* grades each year. Morale is high and students are aware that most of them do well in RE at this school. Almost all students including those with learning difficulties make at least good progress and many make very good progress as reflected in value added measures. Students gain knowledge, skills and understanding at a very good rate across all key stages in RE and there are no unsatisfactory areas. Very few learners under-perform. Results compare very favourably with those in similar schools. Target grade analysis shows that many students achieve the higher of their target grades at GCSE and at AS and A2. The take up of A' level is very high and results at A' level and AS are excellent. Pupils throughout the key stages show an appreciation of the importance of Religious Education as an examination subject and as an essential part of their learning. They demonstrate enjoyment of and confidence in the subject by engaging fully and actively in their work. Learners' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well provided for through the effective RE programme which includes SRE and links with PSHE.

Grade 1

Quality of Teaching and Learning in Religious Education

Teaching and learning in Religious Education is overall outstanding. Lessons are carefully planned and learning objectives are explicit and referred to in lessons. Pupils are able to engage fully in their own learning. Teachers are secure in their knowledge and understanding of the Catholic Faith. Teaching techniques and styles are used which meet pupils' needs. The use of ICT enhances learning and is being further developed. Pupils are good at articulating their learning and respond well to the pace and challenge of Religious Education lessons. Teachers set high expectations of pupils' achievement and they inspire and create enthusiasm for the subject amongst their students. A variety of high quality lesson materials and activities have been developed and ideas and feedback are shared within the department. Teachers challenge pupils to think spiritually, ethically and theologically and to become aware of the demands of religious commitment in everyday life. The response by pupils is excellent and there is a good atmosphere of enjoyment and participation in lessons. Pupils work well individually and in groups and high standards of behaviour and application are the norm. Teachers mark and assess pupils' work thoroughly and constructively and pupils know how they could improve. Teachers are able to use

assessment data to help plan for individual needs. The use of levels of assessment in Key Stage 3 is being developed and will aid this process. Pupils with additional learning needs are well served and the Head of Department works closely with SEN department as needed. Teachers work closely with Learning Support Assistants in class and strategies are continually being developed to support these students in RE. Parents of all pupils are kept well informed of their children's progress in Religious Education.

Grade 1

Quality of the Religious Education Curriculum

Religious Education is seen as the core of the curriculum and contributes significantly to St Benedict's mission to prepare students to be well-educated, effective Christians in the modern world. The school is actively seeking to improve the time allocation at Key Stage 3 to the full 10% and in all other respects it fulfils the requirements of the Diocese and the Curriculum Directory for Catholic Schools. The schemes of work provide for every aspect of a systematic study, at each key stage, of theology, the life and teachings of Jesus, Catholic Faith and the impact of all these on our everyday lives. Pupils are readily engaged in Religious Education. They are interested and see the progress that they can make, not just in terms of knowledge and understanding but in the personal implications of their study. Explicit connections are made which make a significant contribution to the spiritual and moral development of the pupils and they are taught to respect other faiths and cultures. Teachers work well to encourage active methods to optimise learning. All students have access to the Religious Education curriculum which is adapted to their needs and to the needs of the school through the use of differentiated materials and LSA support. Students appreciate the opportunity to develop and express their own views on real life issues and feel that their opinions are respected. They are also encouraged to look outwards and develop sensitive responses to the needs of others. The learning environment for Religious Education is stimulating and interesting displays and artefacts contribute to the quality of learning.

Grade 1

Leadership and management of Religious Education

The leadership and management of the Department is outstanding. The subject leader has a strong sense of the educational mission of the Church and the role of the subject in contributing to the school's part in this. She communicates a strong sense of spiritual purpose to Religious Education teachers and pupils which reflects the whole school vision, and has developed a first class team who have clear direction and purpose in their work. Her focus is on promoting high standards and quality of Religious Education, and on the faith development of the pupils to enable them to become effective Christians in the modern world. Religious Education is very effectively managed in a way that ensures the very best use of resources, continuing monitoring and evaluation and thorough and rigorous quality assurance of its work. There is clear documentation to guide all teaching staff, through the department handbook, Scheme of Work and lesson plans provided by the subject leader. Resources are constantly being developed and planned for and shared amongst colleagues. The leadership of teaching and learning is knowledgeable and innovative and the department models good practice. Teaching and learning is supported by effective professional development. Where appropriate, good links exist with parents, parishes and diocesan agencies and reinforce the high standard of Religious Education. The result is that learners flourish. Religious Education makes a big impact on the life of both staff and pupils at St Benedict's.

Grade 1