



Archdiocese of Birmingham

INSPECTION REPORT

ST BENEDICT'S CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL WARWICKSHIRE

Inspection dates	28 th February-1 st March 2013
Reporting Inspector	Dr John Lally
Assisting Inspector	Mr Paul Nutt

Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Type of School	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11-18 years
Number on roll	633
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governors	Mr Mark O'Connell
School address	Kinwarton Road Alcester Warwickshire B49 6PX
Telephone number	01789.762888
E-mail address	admin@st-benedicts.org
Date of previous inspection	June 2007
DFE School number	937/4730
Unique Reference Number	125755

Headteacher	Mr T Sara
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DIOCESAN EDUCATION SERVICE



Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Diocesan Inspectors. The focus of the inspection was on the effectiveness and use of the school's self evaluation of Catholic life and religious education (RE). To validate the school's self-evaluation of teaching and learning, the inspectors observed 5 RE lessons, one together with the headteacher. In addition the inspectors completed a work scrutiny and held discussions with pupils and sixth form students to evaluate the impact of teaching on their learning over time. They held meetings with the chair of governors, chaplains, members of the senior leadership team, and staff from the RE and other departments. They observed prayer services in the chapel, a year assembly, a spirituality group meeting and a justice and peace group meeting. They looked at a range of evidence related to the school's self evaluation such as RAISEonline, development planning, and teachers' planning. During and prior to the inspection the head of religious education was absent from school through illness so it was not possible to explore subject leadership fully or to see all of the examples of outstanding teaching that the school has identified through its self-evaluation.

Information about the school

St Benedict's Catholic High School is a much smaller than average Catholic secondary school serving parishes in South Warwickshire and South-East Worcestershire. The proportion of baptised Catholic pupils is currently 89%. The pupils are predominantly of White British heritage. This is well below the national average and the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or having a statement of special needs is above average. Attainment on entry is broadly average. Since the last inspection the school has gained a sixth form which is now in its second year with students studying for the International Baccalaureate (IB) or BTEC courses.

Main Finding

In its self-evaluation the school considers itself to be an outstanding Catholic school with outstanding teaching, learning and attainment in religious education. The Catholicity of the school is outstanding and the school's judgement is wholly justified in that respect. Senior leaders and governors give very high priority to the Catholic life of the school and students collaborate fully with the ethos. Over time since the last inspection, attainment in RE has been consistently very high, though in the most recent GCSE examinations it fell well below previous performance levels and below the diocesan average. However, achievement of pupils currently in the school is high. Teaching is good overall with some that is outstanding. Self-evaluation is rooted in very good knowledge and awareness of the school and analysis of performance in RE, but formal processes for review of the school's Catholicity and the relationship of evaluation and planning are undeveloped.

School Self-Evaluation

Senior leaders have a thorough and intimate knowledge of the school. This derives from their long service within St Benedict's and their considerable success in forming its character over many years. Judgements that they make about the Catholic life of the school, the quality of collective worship, liturgy, the spiritual and moral development of the pupils, and the extent to which the pupils benefit from the school's Catholic ethos, are accurate. They are supported by the views of parents and pupils and governors have a good understanding of the school's qualities as a Catholic school.

The judgements made about the Catholic life of the school, however, are not securely evidenced nor the product of diagnostic evaluation. Formal systems and processes are not in place, though senior staff monitor collective worship. As a consequence, judgements in the school's summative evaluation tend largely to be assertions of what is the case, rather than being well founded and substantiated by evidence. Senior staff are able to give plenty of individual examples of what is happening and what their quality is, but not of consistent practice across the school. In one major respect, this matters less as the knowledge of the school is so accurate and planning for future

development, though not derived from evaluation, is effective. The school does not currently lose from the lack of formal evaluative processes in relation to its Catholic life. However, the school is in the process of significant change: the sixth form and the IB are in their second year and will have to be formally evaluated, including for their impact on the Catholic life of St Benedict's; the intake is shortly to be increased which, over time will bring about significant increase in school numbers; and other changes are envisaged, though not yet to take effect. In this development situation, future planning requires a stronger evidence base and the impact of changes must be formally evaluated in order to ensure that they are as effective as possible.

Improvement planning at a whole school level for the Catholic life is present if rather imprecise, but it is fuller and specific within the RE department planning document which plans for chaplaincy, faith enrichment, liturgy and worship across the school. This is understandable as the head of department is a deacon and contributes much to the liturgy and worship life of the school. There is a danger, however, that these areas will be seen as the domain and responsibility of the RE department rather than the whole school. Planning would be strengthened by some statement of how the plans are to be monitored and evaluated as well as by whom and when.

More formal processes are in place for the monitoring and evaluation of religious education. Analysis of the reasons for the dip in performance at GCSE level in 2012 is careful and effective, taking account of a range of probable causes. The school acknowledges that the explanation for the difference between performance in RE and that in other subjects, especially English, is not, and perhaps cannot be, wholly convincing as it is related in part to attitudes of many of those taking the examination. If that was a significant cause, then results in the current Year 11 should be much better as attitudes to the subject are very positive and students' knowledge and understanding are very good. The school's judgements in its summative evaluation that teaching, learning, and assessment are outstanding are not wholly substantiated by inspection evidence and, in discussion with senior leaders, a more realistic judgement emerges. There is excellent practice, but teaching is not consistently outstanding and assessment for learning is not firmly established across the department. Critically, however, students' responses to RE, unusually including to general RE in the sixth form, are highly favourable. They enjoy the subject and hold it in high regard, especially the way in which they are enabled to form and express their own views while at the same time knowing the Church's teaching.

Overall effectiveness of the school¹

Outcomes from religious education at GCSE are normally well above both diocesan average at A*-C grades and similar to the A*-A average, but there was an uncharacteristic dip in performance in 2012. One reason for this was the somewhat negative attitudes of a number of the students to the subject which they did not see as valuable, this being uncharacteristic and not reflected amongst current students. Additionally the results were comparable to those from similar schools using the AQA examination board. Attainment in Key Stage 3 is very good: the pupils show real strengths in producing extended writing with a good grasp of subject language and concepts. They engage very well with their learning and show clear enjoyment of RE. Progress is good from entry to the school and maintained throughout.

Students are very committed to the Catholicity of the school and recognise how they benefit from it. They describe the school's ethos with three words, namely "family, relationships, and faith." The excellent relationships in the community which create a family atmosphere rooted in the Catholic faith are in large measure the product of the students' attitudes as well as those of the staff. All contribute to the common good within the school and through their involvement with the national and international community. They respond very well to opportunities provided for their spiritual and moral development. A group of Year 11 students act as Eucharistic Ministers and the school chaplain values this highly. In the sixth form students, who are fluent, confident and committed, have a very positive attitude to the core RE course which they follow alongside the IB as it enables them to explore and debate issues of relevance to their contemporary lives. In Years 8-11 students

¹ As the quality of the school self evaluation has been affirmed, the judgements in this section of the report conform largely to those of the school.

responded well to a recent mission week and now all years have spirituality groups which meet regularly. Participation in collective worship is strong and the students have abundant opportunities to lead and organise worship through their tutor groups or the spirituality groups. Prayer is an important part of the school's life and is said at four points in each school day. Two priest chaplains contribute very well to the life of the school.

The quality of the Catholic life of the school stems from the senior leadership team and their understanding of how it should be sustained and extended. They know the school very well and communicate their idea of what a Catholic school should be to the staff, inspiring them to give strong support in their turn to the Catholic ethos. Governors are wholly supportive of the school's ethos and share with staff and chaplains in an ethos committee. They are well informed about both Catholic life and religious education, are intent on securing their quality, and have high expectations of the senior leaders.

The quality of teaching is good overall with some that is outstanding and it results in outstanding learning in many classes leading in most circumstances to very high examination performance, despite the shortfall in 2012. The best teaching is extremely well structured, providing detailed explanation of topics and exposition of tasks, and good oral and written feedback on students' work. Relationships in almost all lessons are excellent and students are very well managed. Good teaching relies a little too much on teacher talk and there is too little involvement of some students in oral questioning, but it still ensures that students make good progress in their knowledge and understanding. A clear strength in Key Stage 4 is that at no point does teaching examination technique overwhelm the teaching of the content and skills of the subject. Teachers across the department also succeed in achieving an excellent relationship between RE as a subject and catechesis. The RE curriculum is well covered with all areas of the Catechism and the Curriculum Directory being appropriately addressed. The curriculum provides very well for students' spiritual and moral development.

The St Benedict's fairly judges itself to be an outstanding Catholic school which is highly effectively led by the senior leadership team and governing body. With a more structured and formal approach to self evaluation, it has the capacity for sustained improvement.

Recommendations

- Establish systems and processes for evaluating the Catholic life of the school so as to provide a secure evidence base for future improvement planning.
- Raise attainment in religious education examination back to the levels achieved in previous years.
- Increase the proportion of lessons in RE that are outstanding in part by encouraging more independent learning.



March 2013

Diocesan Education Service,
Don Bosco House,
Coventry Road,
Coleshill,
B46 3EA

Dear Parents and Carers

Section 48 (Diocesan) Inspection of St Benedict's Catholic High School, March 2013

I am writing this letter to share with you the findings of the diocesan inspection of your children's school. Diocesan inspection now explores in detail the school's own view of itself as expressed in its self-evaluation. For this reason, much of the report is more technical than used to be the case. You are still entitled to have a copy of the full report should you want one and it will be available on the school website or by request from the school office.

St Benedict's is an outstanding Catholic school which is highly effectively led by the senior leadership team and governing body. They share a clear vision of the nature of the Catholic school and provide a strong ethos which enables students to grow as individuals within a vibrant spiritual community. Leaders inspire others with their commitment to the Catholic Christian mission of the school and are thoroughly supported in this by the staff and students. They know St Benedict's intimately through long familiarity with the school and providing it with its direction and purpose. They have piloted the school very successfully through its expansion with a sixth form, sustaining its Catholicity in this new venture.

While the GCSE outcomes in religious education in 2012 dipped below diocesan averages and the school's normal very high achievement, performance of students currently in the school promises a return to the usual success rate. Students have a very good understanding of the Catholic faith and the range of issues within the Key Stage 3 curriculum and the GCSE syllabus. Teaching is good overall with much that is outstanding and this encourages very good learning and enjoyment of the subject.

Students describe the school's ethos accurately as "family, relationships, and faith." There are excellent relationships in the community which create a family atmosphere rooted in the Catholic faith and these are in large measure the product of the students' attitudes as well as those of the staff. All contribute to the common good within the school and the wider community.

We have recommended that the school should establish systems and processes for evaluating the Catholic life of the school so as to provide a secure evidence base for future improvement planning; raise attainment in the GCSE RE examination back to the levels achieved in previous years; and increase the proportion of lessons in RE that are outstanding in part by encouraging more independent learning.

Our thanks are due to all of the staff and the students for the generous way in which we were received in the school. The students are a credit to you and to the school.

Yours sincerely

John Lally (Dr)
Diocesan Inspector