



DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD



Inspection Report

Name of School: St Benedict's Catholic College, Colchester

LEA: Essex

Inspection Date: 23rd April 2015

Reporting Inspector: Rev Dr John Dickson SDB, Anne-Marie Brister

This Inspection was carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of School: Secondary comprehensive
School Category: Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils: 11 – 16 yrs
Gender of pupils: Mixed
Number on roll: 824
Appropriate Authority: The Governing Body
Date of previous inspection: 26th March 2012

School Address:
Norman Way
Colchester
Essex
CO3 3US

Tel. No. 01206 549222
Headteacher: Mrs J. Santinelli
Chair of Governors: Mrs M. Moriarty

Information about the school

St Benedict's Catholic College is a Catholic school in the County of Essex in the diocese of Brentwood. It serves 4 main Catholic primary schools in a large catchment area of almost 400 square miles. There are currently 824 students aged 11-16 on roll and the school is over subscribed. About 70% of students are of White British heritage with a large percentage from minority ethnic groups rising to 30% in 2014. About 75% of the students are baptized Catholics. The percentage of students whose first language is not English has risen to 13.2% in 2014. The proportion of students with special educational needs is below the national average and has fallen in recent years and about 15% of students receive free school meals which is also below the national average. There are 49.1 fte. teachers of whom 50% are Catholic and 4 hold the CCRS.

Key grades for inspection

1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires Improvement 4: Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 2

St Benedict's is a good school with some outstanding features with a Catholic ethos which permeates all areas. Prayer and worship are central to the life of the school and opportunities for students' spiritual and moral development are excellent. The Principal and senior leadership team since the last inspection have led a major improvement in the Catholic Life of the school. Their continued efforts will clearly lead to an outstanding Catholic school. Pastoral care is excellent and shared by all members of the school community. Relationships within the school are very good and students feel well cared for and supported in their learning. Parents welcome the Catholicity of the school, appreciate the good communication with staff and the way the school keeps them informed.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

Grade 1

The school has an excellent capacity for sustained improvement and has put in place systems which ensure self-evaluation is accurate and rigorous. The last inspection in 2012 identified four areas for development: to develop consistent expectations of presentation, behaviour and achievement in RE; to enlarge the role of students in learning; to regularly review interim progress; and link teaching in RE to PSHE and related subjects. The recent review of the RE department and our lesson observations show that there is consistency in expectations throughout and that the school has taken seriously the need to review progress in RE. The SRE policy shows a clear understanding of how Catholic teaching will inform PSHE and the detailed schemes of work seen indicate how it will be delivered. Currently additional opportunities are being provided for students to demonstrate their understanding of religious education through participating in Chaplaincy activities. The school gives a high profile to its Catholic identity in its brochure, on its website and in the new Chaplaincy Garden and has very good strategies to share good practice and support new teachers.

The Principal and her senior leadership team and governors have a clear vision indicated in the College Improvement Plan for Christ to be at the Centre of the school's vision and the central place of prayer, worship and religious education. Her vision is of a school that builds a diverse community enriched by the different contributions from different nationalities and cultures and

that meets the different needs of all the students. Senior staff are very good role models and all staff are given opportunities to extend their knowledge and improve their understanding of the nature of a Catholic School and are encouraged to take part in leading assemblies through in-service training.

The current leadership has shown an excellent capacity to maintain effectiveness. The Principal and her deputy show outstanding leadership of a Catholic community through their leadership of prayer and worship and are well supported by staff. Governors have a very wide range of expertise and many are involved in the life of the school. Systems are in place to develop and strengthen initiatives which lead to very good outcomes for all pupils. The Head of Religious Education and the Lay Chaplain are well placed to support colleagues and are engaged in training linked to the new religious education schemes of work.

What the school should do to improve further

Support attainment in RE by a) sharing the existing very good practice in encouraging students to lead their own learning and b) ensuring a more consistent approach to assessment and feedback to enable students to know the Levels they are working at and how to improve them.

Outcomes for students

Grade 2

Progress in religious education at KS3 is good but still below English at the higher levels. In some lessons, students are confident, interested and enthusiastic and take pride in their work in RE. They sustain their concentration and respond well to challenge. They work collaboratively and show respect and understanding of those who hold beliefs that are different from their own. They have a good knowledge of the Catholic faith appropriate to their age and abilities. In other lessons, students can appear passive and lacking confidence and more student-centred approaches might enable even better learning outcomes. Exercise books show coverage of the curriculum and indicate a varied range of tasks. Consistency of approaches to marking, using levels and showing students how to improve is still a work in progress. Standards of attainment at KS 3 have improved over the past few years especially for students with the Pupil Premium. At KS4 the GCSE results which are usually in line with English, last year fell well below what was expected. Steps have been taken to improve the results this year. The gap between boys and girls attainment in 2014 GCSE were particularly striking (28% in 2014) but predictions suggest that should improve this year. At the A*-A grades, attainment is below the national average over the last 3 years.

Students make an outstanding contribution to the Catholic life of the school. They respond very well to opportunities to understand the needs of others in school and the wider community through their participation in CAFOD charity appeals, the Colchester Food bank and supporting the Brentwood Catholic Youth Service events including the Flame2 conference and the Lourdes pilgrimage. Students take responsibility for the life of the school through the Chaplaincy Reps, Chaplaincy Ambassadors and the Senior prefects. The Culture of Respect (carefully cultivated in the school programme of that name) has become a strong reflection of the attitude of students to each other, the staff, their learning and to the wider world. Behaviour is excellent and students value the sense of international community created within the school.

Prayer and worship are central to school life. Students respond positively to opportunities to develop their faith journey. They are involved in preparation for assemblies, liturgies and masses and participate well. Chaplaincy reps and Chaplaincy ambassadors are prepared to lead class prayers and are involved in the weekly Mass held before the school day begins which is

well attended by other pupils. The traditional prayers of the Church are well known and pupils are given time for reflection and meditation. Students are able to express their views on moral issues and apply aspects of Jesus' life and teaching to their own lives. They understand the importance of worship and are given opportunities to create their own prayers and liturgies, examples of which were seen during the inspection. Students are very happy to acknowledge the central place the Chaplaincy plays in the Catholic Life of the School.

Pastoral care is excellent and offers a broad range of support to the different needs of the students, through the Sanctuary, the Oasis, the Inclusion Room and by the availability of counselling. This aspect of school life is given a high priority by staff and governors who work closely together to promote the spiritual development of pupils and the Catholic life of the community. Their interventions have led to improved students attitudes to learning and a fall in fixed term exclusions. Students feel safe, well cared for and know where to go when they need support. They value being in a friendly environment where they are listened to and encouraged to help each other. Parents value the care given to their children, the quality of education and the approachability of staff.

Leaders and managers

Grade 1

The Principal supported by her senior leadership team demonstrates excellent leadership of the school through the way she promotes the provision for the Catholic life of the school. She communicates a clear Catholic vision to the whole community which is affirmed by staff and governors who are all committed to providing the best possible environment for the pupils. Her plans to involve senior staff and Governors in the Visioning process will result in a review of the school vision statement. She has developed a system of self-evaluation which is detailed, accurate and identifies areas for improvement. She, the deputy head, the Head of Religious Education and Lay Chaplain have a very good knowledge of areas for development and are well placed to support colleagues. The Chaplaincy working group (Principal, governor, Lay Chaplain, Head of RE and a member of the local clergy) meet to provide overall strategic direction of the Catholic Ethos and the Head regularly reports to Governors on aspects of its development as does the Lay Chaplain.

In January 2015 Senior leaders led a Review of RE and monitor religious education by means of lesson observations, work scrutiny and joint planning which is followed by feedback to individual teachers. The school has identified the need to put in place additional assessment strategies to ensure pupils are able to demonstrate higher levels of attainment. There is currently a very strong focus on planning and assessment as the school seeks to ensure the highest levels of achievement especially at GCSE.

Governors work closely with senior leadership and have a very good understanding of strengths and areas for development. They are well informed about the life of the school through the Principal's report, meetings with subject leaders and frequent visits. Governors recognise the need to ensure that there is an effective monitoring system in place to evaluate all aspects of the religious life of the school and to enable the governing body to challenge and support effectively.

Leaders ensure that the school is a welcoming community where everyone is respected and valued. Diversity is celebrated and pupils are taught to respect other races, nationalities and other faiths. The regular Polish Mass enables local Polish students and families to feel part of the Catholic School community. The school participates in local sporting and cultural events and

there are good links with partner diocesan Catholic primary schools. Unfortunately the withdrawal of the school transport subsidy has meant that fewer Catholic Children can afford the considerable travel costs. A wide range of charities including the Brentwood Catholic Children's Society CAFOD and the local food bank are supported throughout the year and pupils are given opportunities to develop a sense of service and show compassion for others. This year up to May 2015 the school has raised £6298.84 and half a ton of food for the food bank. School choirs sometimes contribute to parish celebrations of the Feast of Christ the King. Provision for spiritual development ensures that pupils are able to reflect on their own lives and experiences. Parents are invited to many school events and family masses and are kept well informed about their children's welfare and progress.

Provision

Grade 2

Provision for prayer and worship at St Benedict's is outstanding. Assemblies and liturgies are very well planned and contribute to pupils' spiritual development. Each morning students volunteer to lead the Liturgy of the Hours in the school chapel. Assemblies include visual presentations, bible readings drama, singing and music. Students are involved in collective worship in their classrooms and are given opportunities for personal reflection. The beautiful Stations of the Cross prepared for the Lenten Service show effective cross-curricular cooperation and are a tribute to the students' religious culture and creative ability. Each classroom has a crucifix and display boards which generally includes children's work. A beautiful chapel is at the heart of the school and is available for classes and groups. Masses and age appropriate liturgies are celebrated in school throughout the year. Parents and families are invited to many celebrations including the family masses for each year group, held after school. The priests from the deanery support the school through offering mass, and hearing confessions and other liturgies.

The quality of teaching and learning in religious education is good overall. During the inspection, lessons observed were usually good. Lessons are planned with clear learning intentions and an interesting range of activities. At best, Students work very well and make good progress. Teachers respond well to pupils' comments and take every opportunity to extend knowledge and develop understanding. The inspectors saw some lessons that stretched students learning. However, consistently good teaching is a work in progress. Improving the quality of teacher feedback is a high priority but some students are still unsure of their Levels of attainment and exactly how to improve them.

The quality of the religious education curriculum is good in trying to stretch students understanding and there is a good use of ICT. Generally if we include SRE taught in discrete PSHE lessons about 10% of curriculum time is devoted to religious education. The Principal gives religious education a central place in the life of the school and this is demonstrated by the provision of a full time chaplain who contributes to it and the current review of timetable lesson time for KS4. Religious education displays around the school emphasise the centrality of faith to the work of the community. The curriculum enables pupils to become aware of their responsibility for each other and their environment. It contributes very well to their spiritual and moral development. The excellent range of extra-curricular activities enables pupils to develop their gifts and talents. There is every indication that current high standards are likely to be maintained or improved.

The inspectors would like to express our thanks and appreciation to all members of the school community staff, students and governors for their welcome and openness during the inspection.