



INSPECTION REPORT

St Benedict's Catholic School and Sports College

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DfES Number: 115767

Headteacher: Mrs Teresa Gilpin
Chair of Governors: Mr John Kyffin

Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the Diocese of Clifton
and inspection of Denominational Education under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Date of inspection: October 2006
Date of previous inspection: November 1999

Reporting Inspector: Mrs Anne Barrett

Description of School

St. Benedict's is a smaller than average Catholic comprehensive school which has had sports college status since 1999. There are 668 pupils of whom 20% are baptised Catholics. The school has a higher than average proportion of pupils with low levels of attainment and with learning difficulties and disabilities. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is higher than usual. The majority of pupils (91%) are White British. From September 2007, the school will become a joint Catholic and Anglican school. Consequently, from September 2006, the school has had two governing bodies, one for St. Benedict's and one for the new joint school. The headteacher who had been acting headteacher from September 2004 was confirmed in post in September 2005 and a new head of RE appointed.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

All of the issues raised in the last inspection have been addressed. In particular, the school has made good progress in improving its chaplaincy provision. A full time lay chaplain has been in post since September 2005 and he has been very effective in setting up a chaplaincy team which meets regularly and is strongly supported by the leadership team. The chapel now plays an important part in enhancing the spiritual life of the school and is much more widely used by pupils. Although the RE department has experienced ongoing disruption because of staffing issues, it has now reached a period of relative stability with a head of department who has been in post since 2005 and another specialist who took up post in September 2006. This, in turn, has had a positive impact on standards.

Grade 2

The capacity of the school to make further improvements

The school's capacity for improvement is good. The governing body and the new headteacher share a common vision of the school's mission as a Catholic school and a commitment to the maintenance and development of its Catholic identity as it moves towards joint Catholic/Anglican status. In addition, the quality of leadership of the headteacher, leadership team and head of RE is clearly focused on the raising of standards and the development of spirituality across the school. Currently, this is a challenging task because of the high proportion of pupils (80%) who have no experience of the Catholic tradition, beliefs or practice. The change to joint status will play an important part in attracting pupils from both traditions and move the school towards an even stronger 'Christ Centred' community. The governors and headteacher recognise that this is a challenging but exciting opportunity and are appreciative of the commitment of local clergy from both the Catholic and Anglican churches. They see it as strengthening their position in bringing the good news of the Gospel to the community of young people and parents that they serve. They are well aware of the challenges to be faced and have spent the last 4 years in careful planning and preparation. Plans are in hand to set up an Inset day in February 2007 in order to establish the vision and mission for the new school. In addition,

the RE department have begun to pilot the new Key stage 3 syllabus in September 2006, starting with year 7. This has been developed in collaboration with both Dioceses.

Grade 2

What the school should do to improve further

- To continue to work towards enhancing a strong Christian ethos which clearly reflects the Catholic and Anglican traditions.
- To continue to develop appropriate courses at Key Stage 4 and raise attainment at GCSE.
- Enhance the existing chaplaincy team to include representatives from both traditions and ensure that pupils and staff are involved at all stages in the process.

The Catholic Life of the School

Leadership and Management

Governors are effective in their role in relation to the school's Catholic foundation and have a good awareness of the strengths and development needs of the school. They provide both support and challenge to the headteacher.

Since the appointment of the current headteacher in February 2005, there has been a very strong focus on the promotion of the school's Catholic mission and learners' personal development as well as on the raising of standards in RE. The headteacher has a clear sense of the mission of the Catholic school within the community and is passionate in her commitment to safeguarding this dimension as the school moves towards joint status. She and the newly formed leadership team have actively promoted the development of chaplaincy and this is now becoming a strong feature within the school.

The system for monitoring RE is good, accurately identifying strengths and areas for improvement. This now needs to be extended further, with particular reference to pupils' spiritual and moral development across the curriculum. Work is in hand to ensure that all staff clearly understand and support the vision and ethos of a faith school. Links with parishes and outside agencies are good and continue to improve. In addition the school is well served by local clergy and the Diocesan education team. The latter have been especially supportive in ensuring the school's success with the establishment of joint school status.

As the school moves towards joint status the shadow governing body has equal numbers of Catholic and Anglican foundation governors and an Ethos Committee has been appointed to support and monitor the development of the Christian ethos.

Grade 2

Collective Worship

Provision for collective worship is satisfactory and continues to improve. Pupils have an opportunity to pray together daily in tutor time and each week in year assemblies. Tutor-led prayer is effectively supported by a weekly prayer/meditation newsletter. There is a satisfactory liturgical programme which includes class Masses for pupils in year 8 and Easter and Advent liturgies. In addition, pupils in year 7 and 8 attend Mass on feast days with an option for others to attend if they wish. There is also a voluntary bi-weekly Mass for staff and pupils. During Lent provision is made for all tutor groups to attend a service of reconciliation in the school chapel. Assemblies are well planned, inclusive and orderly. They clearly reflect the values and mission of the school with opportunities to participate in prayer. Chaplaincy has become an important

feature of the school and continues to grow. The chaplaincy assistant has been quietly proactive in promoting pupils spiritual, moral, social and cultural dimension. He provides opportunities for pupils to take part in a 4 day retreat at Kintbury (year 10) and to participate in an annual pilgrimage to Lourdes during Easter. There are also good opportunities to take part in charity events and gain a real understanding of those who are less fortunate. These include fund raising for CAFOD, twinning and fund raising for a school in Zambia, visiting and fundraising for a local Catholic special school; carol singing at a home for the elderly. In order to improve further consideration should be given to extending these voluntary activities to a wider range of pupils.

Grade 3

Religious Education

Achievement and Standards in Religious Education

The attainment of pupils on entry is below the national average with a high proportion of pupils arriving in school with no experience of Catholic tradition, beliefs or practice. Given that a significant number of pupils start from a very low knowledge base, achievement is satisfactory in relation to prior attainment.

Standards at GCSE are well below the national average and below those achieved in other subjects. This is due to a combination of factors which include; pupils starting from a very low knowledge base; lack of faith commitment; ongoing staffing difficulties resulting in pupils being taught by non specialist cover teachers and an over ambitious policy to enter all pupils for the full GCSE course. This, in turn has had a negative impact on pupils' perception of RE as being boring and irrelevant. However, the new head of department and team have made a dramatic impact in a very short space of time and have begun to put in place effective strategies to address this. This has led to improved results in the year 10 GCSE exam, improvement in pupils' attitude towards the subject and pupil progress.

By the end of Key Stage 3 progress is satisfactory in relation to prior attainment. The use of a range of differing and highly appropriate teaching strategies has begun to make a positive impact on standards at both key stage 3 and 4. This is particularly noticeable in year 7 where pupils have not experienced the staffing problems of previous years. The introduction of assessment for learning has been significant in enabling pupils to be more aware of where they are at in their learning and what they need to do in order to improve.

Grade 3

Teaching and learning in Religious Education

Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Teachers have good subject knowledge and are attentive to pupils' different learning styles, providing a range of activities which take account of kinaesthetic, auditory and visual learners. The best teaching was characterised by effective planning, reinforcement of key words, appropriate pace and support. This enabled pupils to make progress and to become effective in expressing their understanding of religious ideas and concepts, both orally and in writing. Learning was less effective when teachers did not strictly adhere to the school's behaviour for learning policy and the poor behaviour of a minority of pupils dominated.

Relationships between teachers and pupils are good because teachers place a strong emphasis on motivating and rewarding good attitudes and behaviour and are attentive to pupils' individual learning needs. In order to enable pupils to progress further, attention should focus on providing clear opportunities for pupils to write more extensively and the promotion of thinking skills. This,

combined with more diagnostic marking and levelled assessments will make a significant impact in improving standards overall.

Grade 3

Quality of the Curriculum

The new head of department has been very effective in updating and enhancing curriculum provision in RE, in order to meet the needs of learners. Appropriate schemes of work are now in place for Key Stage 3 and 4. As the school moves towards joint status, pupils in year 7 are following a syllabus which has been developed in consultation with the appropriate Catholic and Anglican Diocese. In year 8 and 9, the syllabus fulfils the requirement of the Curriculum Directory for Catholic schools building on 'The Truth' and 'The Life' through the development of good in house resources. Particular emphasis is placed on ensuring that pupils understand what faith and commitment to Christian values involves as well as promoting respect, tolerance and belonging. The syllabus is enriched by the use of innovative teaching strategies and learning experiences which enable pupils to structure and sequence their writing. These include writing frames, use of the 5 Ws (who, what, where, why, when), paired and group discussion. The change to a modular GCSE has improved learners' attitude to the subject and created a different work ethos, resulting in improved results at the end of year 10. In addition the topics covered encourage reflective discussion and debate whilst raising issues of faith and belief. Provision in year 10 and 11 could be further improved by varying the range of exams available for pupils to cater for different levels of ability. The full GCSE course is not appropriate for all pupils and has contributed to low performance at GCSE.

Grade 2

Leadership and management of Religious Education

Leadership and management of the department is good. The new head of department has been extremely effective in moving the department on after a long period of instability. Consequently, she has made an important contribution to the school's Catholic mission and on the raising of standards in RE. She brings a wealth of experience to the department and is very effective in supporting colleagues. She has been pro-active in monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning and is very aware of the areas for development and what need to be done to implement this. This bodes well for the future. The challenge will be to sustain and improve upon this progress as the school moves towards joint status.

Grade 2