



St Benedict's Catholic College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 115382
Local Authority ESSEX
Inspection number 290228
Inspection date 1 November 2006
Reporting inspector Gulshanbir Kayembe

This inspection of the college was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary	College address	Norman Way
School category	Voluntary aided		Colchester
Age range of pupils	11–16		Essex CO3 3US
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01206 549222
Number on roll (college)	813	Fax number	01206 579342
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs Mary Moriarty
		Headteacher	Mr Alan Whelan
Date of previous college inspection	Not previously inspected		

Age group 11–16	Inspection date 1 November 2006	Inspection number 290228
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the college

The college is situated in Colchester but draws from a wide catchment area due to its Catholic character. The majority of students travel in by bus, many coming from as far as Harwich and Clacton. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well below average. The large majority of students are of White British heritage and about 10% are from a variety of minority ethnic backgrounds, some speaking English as an additional language. Attainment on entry is usually a little above average but there are some variations amongst year groups. The current Year 10 is a particularly strong group but the Year 11 students who took GCSE examinations in 2006 entered the college with broadly average attainment. There are few of the most able students because of the presence of selective schools in the local area.

The college has a business and enterprise specialism. It has won a number of awards such as Investors in People, Chartermark and Sportsmark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the college

Grade: 2

St Benedict's is a good school with many outstanding features. There are a few areas for improvement, with English being the most significant.

Standards are above average and achievement is good. In Key Stage 3, standards in mathematics and science are high. Performance at GCSE is significantly above the national average with many subjects reaching standards that are well above national norms. Students' basic skills of literacy are very well developed. However, their standards in English as a subject have lagged behind those in mathematics and science over the past two years, particularly in the Key Stage 3 tests. Although 2006 results were better and students' achievement was satisfactory, they still did not meet the college's ambitious targets. The improvement in English between 2005 and 2006 in GCSE examinations was more marked. Though standards in English at Key Stage 4 are above average, the college recognises that students could do better still. Students' performance reflects the good quality of teaching. This is strongest in the subjects where students achieve the best. In English, there is some outstanding teaching. However, there is some weaker teaching that does not challenge students sufficiently.

Students' personal development and well-being are excellent and this is evident in the outstanding attendance and behaviour. The college has created a very stimulating environment where students flourish as individuals and develop a very strong sense of personal identity and responsibility. As one parent put it, 'St Benedict's is more than a school. It is a community'. The community atmosphere of the college fosters a caring ethos and creates a strong sense of belonging. Students look out for one another and develop a tremendous sense of justice and fairness. Curricular provision is good and well tailored to individual students' needs. Students are exceptionally well cared for. They feel safe and are safe. Individual needs are very well catered for and excellent use is made of external agencies and providers to support students' learning and well-being. Strong provision for physical education enables students as a whole to adopt healthy lifestyles. Boys in particular benefit from the wide range of sporting activities as this contributes to their general enthusiasm about the college. Students, through the college council, have themselves initiated a successful campaign of healthy eating. Overall, students are exceptionally well prepared for future life.

The success of the college owes much to the principal, who provides outstanding leadership. He is ambitious for the college to do even better and has a firm focus on providing a broad education for students that is as strong in meeting their personal development as their academic needs. Senior staff support the principal well and lead and manage their areas of work with skill, energy and enthusiasm. Self evaluation is accurate, and the principal and senior staff have a secure grasp of how good the college is and where improvements are needed. They are focusing well on improving English and supporting improvements in the leadership and management of the subject. The roles of other middle managers are developing well. They make good use of data to secure high standards but are not monitoring teaching and learning regularly enough to influence further improvements in their areas. Governors work well in partnership with the college and provide clear planning for its future development.

What the college should do to improve further

- Raise standards in English by improving the quality of leadership and teaching.
- Develop the roles of middle managers in monitoring and evaluating their areas, and particularly the quality of teaching.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are above average by the end of Key Stage 3 and well above by the end of Key Stage 4. Students make good progress because of the good provision and their very positive attitudes. However, achievement in English in Key Stage 3 is only satisfactory and in the 2005 Key Stage 3 tests, results were particularly low. Though a high proportion of students reached the expected level, relatively few attained the higher levels, Levels 6 and 7. The 2006 test results are much better but still not as good as they should be given students' capabilities. Performance in mathematics and science is much stronger and students achieve very well in these subjects.

Performance at GCSE is significantly above the national average. A high proportion of students gain five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C. The college is focusing well on tackling the underlying issues in English that are causing lower performance and this has led to above results at GCSE in 2006 in English. Able students achieve well though the college overall does not get as many of the highest GCSE grades, A* to A, as other similar schools. Generally, this is because the college has few of the highest attainers. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities achieve well and, at times, exceptionally well. The small number from minority ethnic backgrounds make good progress and beginners in English make rapid progress in learning the language.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

One parent noted that, 'The strong ethos builds confidence and security in students'. This is very evident in discussions with them. The college has created a unique atmosphere that provides significant opportunities for personal growth. As a result, students of all backgrounds develop into exceptionally confident, articulate and mature youngsters who are able to express their views and ideas with considerable self-assurance. For example, students with learning difficulties or behaviour needs are equally involved in representing the college in sports teams and taking positions of responsibility across the college. Students' very positive attitudes to college and work are reflected in the high attendance rates, despite long journeys for many, and their excellent behaviour.

The Catholic nature of the college makes a significant contribution to students' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students make an excellent contribution to their local and wider community by, for example, organising fund raising events. Older students provide vibrant role models for younger ones. Those from minority ethnic backgrounds are represented very well amongst those who

have lead roles or responsibilities across the college. Students are highly active in the work to make the college a safe place through, for example, the anti-bullying work they do. There is a extremely strong awareness amongst students of what constitutes healthy living. Boys and girls are equally enthusiastic about participating in sporting activities and maintaining a healthy diet. Students speak animatedly about the college canteen's healthy and nutritious meals. The high level of initiative and independence shown by students, their capacity to work together, their awareness of the wider world as well as their very good skills in literacy and numeracy ensure that they are exceptionally well prepared for future life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning are good. There is outstanding teaching but also some that is just satisfactory. Teachers have well-developed relationships with students and, in the best lessons, they work in partnership to achieve learning of high quality. In most lessons, teachers use their good subject knowledge to probe students' understanding and enable them to grasp the more complex subject-related ideas. High expectations and brisk pace are key characteristics of lessons that are good or better. Students actively participate in these lessons through well-designed tasks, and younger students bubble over with enthusiasm and ideas. In English, there is some outstanding teaching but also teaching that is only satisfactory. The latter lacks the sparkle and the stimulating discussions that are evident in the better teaching, features which have students sitting on the edge of their seats. The less effective teaching in English does not engage students actively in their learning and does not expect enough from them. Teaching in the special needs base is of high quality and promotes exceptionally good progress. For example, students with learning difficulties develop the confidence to give talks to the rest of the class. Other students, following encouragement from the teacher, willingly ask probing and interesting questions of the speakers. Subject teachers make good use of teaching assistants to support students with learning difficulties and disabilities. Staff use the information gained from a good range of assessments, to meet effectively students' needs.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The college provides a curriculum that meets the full range of needs. There is very broad provision in Key Stage 4, though most of the courses offered are academic. Students take a higher proportion of GCSEs at St Benedict's than is the case in schools nationally and results are significantly above national norms. The college has developed some good quality vocational provision and is investigating to extend this further. The curriculum is shaped according to local needs, for example, 90% or more of the students continue to AS and A level. Where necessary, the curriculum is suitably adapted to meet individual needs. More work is being done to widen the range of curriculum

options for some students in the light of the national developments for 14 to 19 year olds.

The curriculum provides very well for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development particularly through the very good range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities. Business and enterprise are taught effectively through the curriculum and make a unique contribution to students' understanding of global issues, so much so that students run their own 'fair trade' shop. The programmes for personal and social education and citizenship are very well developed enabling students to be well informed about, for example, the dangers of drugs and alcohol. Students value this input. Provision for students with learning disabilities and difficulties is good overall and outstanding in the special needs base. The provision for gifted and talented students is good and improving. The addition of critical thinking studies for the ablest students in Key Stage 4 has made a significant contribution to their thinking skills.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care, guidance and support for students are excellent. Students are very well cared for and looked after. The college does all it can to ensure their health and safety and well-being. For example, it thoroughly checks the backgrounds of all adults who come into contact with students. There is a full-time nurse and students have access to counsellors. The Chaplaincy team is available to provide support and guidance to students. A special room called the 'sanctuary' is offered for those who are feeling vulnerable or out of sorts. External agencies and organisations are used exceptionally well to support individuals.

Support and guidance for academic development is good. An excellent system for monitoring and tracking students' progress is used to identify any who are beginning to underachieve and to provide timely information to parents on how well their children are doing. Very well-developed mentoring and other support schemes are used to help those students who show signs of lagging behind. Teachers know their students well. Students are clear about their targets and feedback to them is good, so that they know how well they are doing. However, in English, marking sometimes tends to give praise rather than guide students on what they need to do to make their work better.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The leadership and management of the college are good. The principal leads by example. The way the college has developed, the ethos it has promoted and the outstanding personal development of students are a reflection of the principal's educational philosophy. Parents are very positive about the college. There is very good teamwork between the principal and senior staff. They work coherently together on the college's priorities which are well informed by their honest and rigorous self-evaluation. Good account is taken of the views of parents, students and other stakeholders. Improvement, where it is needed, is well planned. For example, a well

developed action plan for raising achievement in English is in place. Senior staff are currently working on improving the monitoring and evaluation roles of middle managers. The latter make active use of data to support students' learning and are broadly aware of how well their areas are performing. However, they have limited involvement in monitoring and evaluating lessons so they are not in the best position to secure further improvement in teaching. Governors work well in partnership with the college and are well informed about its strengths and weaknesses. The chair of governors visits the college regularly and has her finger on the pulse. Governors manage finances well and the college provides good value for money.

The college is focusing on the right priorities for development. Good improvements have been secured since the last inspection, for example, standards at GCSE are now higher. It therefore, has good capacity to improve further.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	College 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
How well does the college work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the college's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

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

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?	1

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.

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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	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 college require special measures?	No
Does this college require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

2 November 2006

Dear Students

St Benedict's Catholic College, Norman Way, Colchester, Essex. CO3 3US

I greatly enjoyed visiting your college and would like to thank you for your help and cooperation during my visit. You acted as excellent ambassadors for your college and I felt very privileged to meet and talk to young people as mature, confident and caring as you.

Your college provides a good quality education for you. Some of the major strengths are

- The college provides a very warm and friendly atmosphere and students look out for one another.
- You enjoy college and learning and take a very active part in college life often initiating and organising activities and events yourselves.
- You achieve well and do particularly well at GCSE reaching standards that are well above average.
- You are taught well and your teachers are always ready to help you when you need it.
- Your principal leads the college exceptionally well and is keen to make sure you do the best that you can.
- You are extremely well supported, looked after and cared for.

As in any school or college, there is always room for improvement. In your college, the key improvement areas are:

- Better performance in English by improving the quality of leadership and teaching
- More time for heads of department to observe lessons to help make teaching even better.

With best wishes

Gulshan Kayembe Lead Inspector