

# St Benedict's Catholic College

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique reference number</b>	115382
<b>Local authority</b>	Essex
<b>Inspection number</b>	379073
<b>Inspection dates</b>	12–13 January 2012
<b>Lead inspector</b>	Stephen Abbott HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	821
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mary Moriarty
<b>Headteacher</b>	Peter Johnson
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 November 2006
<b>School address</b>	Norman Way Colchester CO3 3US
<b>Telephone number</b>	01206 549222
<b>Fax number</b>	01206 579342
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<b>Inspection date(s)</b>	12–13 January 2012
<b>Inspection number</b>	379073



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## Introduction

Inspection team

Stephen Abbott

Her Majesty's Inspector

Richard Glasby

Additional inspector

Mandy Snook

Additional inspector

David Webster

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. In planning the inspection, the inspectors took account of the college's attainment and progress data, its self-evaluation and improvement planning documents and responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View). During the inspection, inspectors scrutinised students' work and observed 33 lessons involving 33 teachers. They made short visits to several lessons and withdrawal groups to check on provision for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. They held meetings with senior and middle leaders, members of the governing body and groups of students, teachers and teaching assistants. They examined the college's assessment, attendance and behaviour records, the bullying and racist incident logs, the single central record of safeguarding checks, health and safety documents and the minutes of governing body meetings. They analysed questionnaire responses from 204 parents and carers, 139 students and 56 members of staff.

## Information about the school

St Benedict's Catholic College is a smaller than average sized secondary school. It has dual specialisms in Business and Enterprise and Languages. The school exceeds the current floor standards set by government for the minimum expectations for attainment and progress. The college has been led by an Acting Principal since March 2011, when the then Principal resigned. A new Principal has been appointed and will take up her post by April 2012.

The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. Just over a quarter of students have disabilities and/or special educational needs. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is 20%. Few students are at an early stage of learning English. A small number of students attend alternative provision for part of the week in a local further education college.

The college holds the Sportsmark and Eco-Schools Silver awards and has Healthy Schools status. It also holds the Essex Recognition of Quality Awards for careers education and guidance, work-related learning and education business links. As the college is a faith school, its religious character will be subject to a separate inspection.

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

## Inspection judgements

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Achievement of pupils</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Quality of teaching</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Behaviour and safety of pupils</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>3</b>

## Key findings

- This is a satisfactory school. When the Acting Principal took over in April 2011, students' behaviour and progress were at a low ebb. He took prompt action to revitalise and restructure the leadership team. This has stabilised the college by improving students' behaviour and progress and by restoring staff morale.
- The strengths of the school are the rich curriculum and high quality of pastoral care which help to promote good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development for students. Most cases of bullying are dealt with effectively.
- Students' attainment is above average when they join the school. Over the last few years, their progress has not kept pace with other schools, and is now satisfactory. GCSE results have been improving nationally, but not at St Benedict's, where they are now only just above average.
- The monitoring of students' academic progress is improving. However, the drive and ambition to improve teaching and learning and to raise achievement is inconsistent among middle leaders.
- Learning and progress are satisfactory because the quality of teaching is inconsistent. In effective lessons, students progress well because they are actively engaged in a variety of enjoyable learning activities and because teachers regularly check their understanding. However, in nearly half of lessons, there are few checks on learning and students experience too much teacher talk and undemanding work.
- The quality of assessment is variable. In the best cases, students receive regular guidance on how to improve their work, but some marking is too irregular or superficial to accelerate students' progress.
- Learning support has improved since the leadership reorganisation. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are making good progress.
- Students have responded well to the revised behaviour code. Most enjoy school, behave well and act safely, but behaviour is judged satisfactory because learning is sometimes slowed by low-level disruption.

Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

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## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Establish a more coherent and determined drive for improvement by ensuring that all middle leaders demonstrate the drive and ambition needed to establish consistency, improve teaching and learning and raise achievement.
- Raise achievement by bringing the satisfactory teaching up to good by:
  - ensuring that all teachers have high expectations and use assessment information effectively to plan activities that provide appropriate starting points and levels of challenge for each student
  - improving teachers' skills in assessing students' understanding and progress during lessons, and adapting their teaching where necessary
  - ensuring that all teachers provide regular and effective guidance for students on how to improve their work.
- Embed the recently improved procedures for managing behaviour, recording bullying and monitoring health and safety by ensuring that they are consistently applied.

## Main report

### Achievement of pupils

Over the last few years, students' rate of progress has shown a steady decline. In each of the last three years, 61% of students have gained five or more GCSEs at grade C or above, including English and mathematics. In the same period, the national average has risen from 50% to 57%. Overall standards have remained above average, representing satisfactory progress for students from their above average starting points. The school's own assessments suggest that attainment is average in Year 11 but above average in Year 10, due to better progress in Key Stage 3. Furthermore, improved learning support in the last year has enabled students with special educational needs and/or disabilities to make good progress.

Most parents and carers feel that their children are making good progress at the school, though some have valid concerns. Students' learning and progress are satisfactory in around half of their lessons and good or better in just under half. In the less effective lessons, learning and progress are slowed because students are given a passive listening role and limited guidance on how to improve. However, when they are taught well, students respond accordingly. They are actively involved in their learning, work together well and contribute thoughtfully to classroom discussion. They are motivated to succeed and make good use of detailed feedback to improve their work.

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The school's languages speciality is reflected in the higher than average proportion gaining success in modern foreign languages, which also include French, German, Spanish and Polish. For example, in an outstanding language lesson, students spoke confidently in German as they practised language associated with schools. They made detailed notes, raising their own questions, such as how to say 'last period', rather than 'fifth period'.

In English and mathematics, students experience a mix of good and satisfactory teaching. For example, in one mathematics lesson, students showed perseverance to tackle challenging new problems; in another, students were content to complete numerous easy questions and, in a third, students attempted to memorise rules. Over time, students develop sufficient knowledge, understanding and skills, in reading, writing, communication and mathematics, to prepare them for the next stage in their education or employment.

### **Quality of teaching**

The main reason why students' progress is satisfactory rather than good is the inconsistent quality of teaching and assessment. The most effective teachers use assessment information well to plan their lessons to meet the full range of students' learning needs. They provide a variety of stimulating learning activities, including group work, problem solving, role play, paired discussion and extended writing to ensure that students enjoy their lessons and develop independent learning skills. During periods when students are working independently, these teachers move around the class, tackling misconceptions and checking for slow starters and those needing further challenge. They also mark students' work regularly, providing them with clear guidance on how to improve.

Too often, however, the teaching is mundane, being dominated by teacher talk, questions testing factual recall and low-level activities such as copying notes or tackling routine mathematical exercises. In satisfactory lessons, teachers' awareness of students' difficulties is patchy because they allocate less time to independent work by students and ask fewer questions to probe understanding. In some cases, the problem is exacerbated because marking is irregular or confined to occasional tests and homework. This lack of assessment information means that subsequent lessons are not always tailored to meet students' individual needs. Most parents and carers are content with much of the teaching, though some have well-founded concerns about the inconsistent use of homework.

Students with disabilities and/or special educational needs receive regular, well-focused support from a well-organised team of learning support assistants. Catch-up classes and one-to-one support are provided to help students reach age-related expectations in mathematics and English. Students at an early stage of acquiring English are withdrawn from certain lessons for effective specialised teaching. However, there is no concerted programme to promote literacy across the curriculum, so practice is inconsistent.

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The school's business and enterprise specialism permeates the curriculum and contributes to students' financial capability and their understanding of sustainability, fair trade and social enterprise.

## **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Good behaviour has traditionally been a strength of the school, but has slipped in recent years. Most parents and carers and a majority of students consider behaviour in the school to be good overall, but nearly 30% of parents and carers and 40% of students report that lessons are sometimes disrupted. Since the leadership restructure in 2011, behaviour management has been strengthened, and this is welcomed by students. Although the new strategies are not universally applied, behaviour has improved in the last year and the few cases of low-level disruption that occurred during the inspection were mostly well managed by teachers. Students with behavioural difficulties respond well to the support and behaviour strategies they are offered. Serious incidents are relatively rare and exclusion rates are below average. During the inspection, students were polite and respectful of each other and adults. They were very open and honest with inspectors, particularly about the problems that were occurring a year ago that culminated in a student protest. They report significant improvements in behaviour and relationships under the Acting Principal.

Anti-bullying strategies are very well developed, including an award for bully-free form groups. Students who have experienced bullying confirm that the school deals with bullying promptly and, in most cases, effectively through reconciliation meetings, restorative justice and follow-up checks. As a result, most students and their parents and carers consider the school to be a safe environment. The school keeps records of every case of bullying or intimidating behaviour. The records show that most cases are relatively minor and few involve racism. However, until this academic year, the school has not recorded bullying incidents in an efficient way. Information about students who experienced bullying was held in individual files but the central bullying record only named the perpetrators.

Students' attendance is close to the national average, but recent action has led to improved attendance among students known to be eligible for free school meals and those with higher levels of special educational needs and/or disabilities. Students have an accurate perspective on their own and others' safety. They are taught about cyber-safety and bullying. Health and safety rules are taught early in Year 7 and reinforced through the curriculum. Senior leaders and the governing body are currently reviewing health and safety issues, and recognise the need to centralise the relevant records. They have improved fire safety by providing external fire exits for many ground-floor classrooms. Risk assessments are up to date.

## **Leadership and management**

Leadership and management are satisfactory. When the governing body appointed the Acting Principal in Spring 2011 they recognised that morale was low, leadership

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was proving ineffective and students' progress and behaviour were declining. They asked him to stabilise the school and to start the process of restoring it to its prior effectiveness. The Acting Principal recognised that improvements would be needed in many areas. He made some key changes to leadership responsibilities that allowed senior leaders to work to their strengths. As a result, the leadership team has grown in effectiveness and improvements have been made to behaviour management, learning support and anti-bullying strategies. New management information systems have been established and are beginning to provide useful data to support monitoring and evaluation. While some of the new procedures are not fully embedded, the changes have already shown results. The monitoring of teaching and learning is accurate. Senior and middle leaders are now better focused on students' progress and the quality of teaching and assessment. Although some inconsistency remains, particularly at middle management level, a renewed capacity for improvement exists because there is now a critical mass of staff with the expertise and commitment to move the school forward.

The school has retained some of its strengths. The curriculum is good. Enrichments such as visits and visitors, international links, and themes linked to justice and peace and to the London Olympics all make a strong contribution to students' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students develop wider skills and personal qualities as prefects, school governors, peer mentors, student counsellors, sports ambassadors, language leaders, and within enterprise groups. Many are involved in raising funds to support the Catholic aid agency, CAFOD. Citizenship is a strength of the college, which takes every opportunity to engage students in the democratic process, for example in elections for the Young Essex Assembly.

Effective pastoral support for the most vulnerable students is coordinated through regular meetings of the learning, attendance, behaviour and safeguarding team. It is enhanced by partnerships with other care agencies, including the Brentwood Catholic Children's Society, which provides emotional support for students affected by bereavement, separation and divorce. The school has appropriate arrangements for safeguarding, including regular child protection training for all staff. The school promotes equality and tackles discrimination well. Management information is analysed to monitor the performance and involvement of different groups. Students learn about human rights and the importance of respect and friendship towards others, including disabled people.

The governing body provides good support and appropriate challenge for the school. Members of the governing body keep themselves well informed through regular visits and discussions with stakeholders.



## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

### Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



16 January 2012

Dear Students

### **Inspection of St Benedict's Catholic College, Colchester, CO3 3US**

Following the recent inspection, your school has been judged satisfactory. The school is gradually emerging from a difficult period which has affected relationships in the school and led to a decline in behaviour and academic progress. Some of you felt so strongly that you took part in a protest last year. You have told us that the school has improved since Mr Johnson took over as Acting Principal.

We saw a mixture of good and satisfactory teaching. Over the last few years, students' progress has not kept pace with other schools, and is now satisfactory. GCSE results have been improving nationally, but not at St Benedict's, where they are now only just above average. However, there are signs of improvement lower down the school. In addition, better learning support means that those of you with special educational needs and/or disabilities are making good progress.

There are still some areas that need to improve. We have recommended that all the senior and middle leaders focus hard on raising achievement. We have asked the school to spread the good teaching to more lessons by making better use of marking and assessment during lessons to help you improve your work. We want more teachers to use this assessment information to plan interesting lessons that recognise your different needs. Finally, we want all staff to make sure that they follow the new procedures fully, especially for managing behaviour.

Most of you enjoy school and feel safe. However, several of you are concerned about low-level disruption that affects some lessons. On behalf of the inspection team, I would like to thank you all for the welcome we received, and to thank especially those of you who gave up your time to talk to us or to complete our questionnaires. You can help the school to improve by making sure that you stay focused in lessons and encourage others to behave well.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Abbott  
Her Majesty's Inspector

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