

St Gregory's Catholic College

Combe Hay Lane, Bath, BA2 8PA

Inspection dates 16–17 July, 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- Students' achievement is outstanding. All groups, including higher ability students, those who speak English as an additional language and those who have special educational needs, make rapid progress in relation to their starting points and abilities.
- The quality of teaching is outstanding. Many lessons feature stimulating pace and high expectations. Questions are probing and tasks are creative, imaginative and challenging.
- Students' behaviour is excellent both in and out of lessons. Students feel safe, attitudes to learning are positive and the quality of relationships is marked by respect and good humour.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is exceptional. It is a strong feature in many lessons and in all aspects of the curriculum.
- Leadership and management are outstanding, driven by a visionary, enthusiastic and highly approachable executive headteacher. He is supported by skilled and innovative school leaders who, together, drive improvement rigorously and have the students' best interests in mind.
- The governing body is highly effective. It is fully aware of its leadership and management role. Governors have been closely involved in the college and have a very good understanding of its priorities.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 38 part lessons, involving 35 teachers, 10 of whom were jointly observed with the headteacher and senior leaders. In addition, other sessions were visited to determine how well the needs of individual students are taken into account and to look at the quality of marking.
- Meetings were held with the executive headteacher, head of school, five groups of students, the Vice-Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors, a variety of other leaders, and groups of staff. The lead inspector also had a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of 72 responses to Parent View, plus one letter from a parent.
- There were 45 staff questionnaires returned and considered by the inspection team.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation including examples of students' work, the college's own information on students' attainment and progress, records of attendance and behaviour, and information about governor meetings, safeguarding, college planning and performance management.

Inspection team

Sheila Crew, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
David Hogg	Additional Inspector
David Howe	Additional Inspector
Lesley Leak	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Gregory's Catholic College is smaller than the average-sized secondary school and is a specialist college for the performing arts and modern foreign languages.
- Most students are of White British heritage. The proportion of students who are from minority ethnic backgrounds and the proportion who speak English as an additional language are both below average.
- The proportion of students for whom the college receives Year 7 catch-up premium and pupil premium is below average. This is additional funding provided for looked after children, students known to be eligible for free school meals and children of service families.
- The proportions of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported at school action or who are supported at school action plus and those who have a statement of special educational needs are below the national average.
- Since the last inspection the college was designated as a National Support School and the executive headteacher as a National Leader of Education (NLE).
- The executive headteacher is seconded on a part-time basis to St Mark's Church of England School in Bath, where he has led an improvement programme for the past two years. The head of school leads St Gregory's in his absence.
- At the time of the inspection, construction work was being carried out on a building which is due to open to a newly-created sixth form in September 2013. This is a part of the federation between St Gregory's and St Mark's, with a joint sixth form under the executive headteacher's leadership.
- The college uses alternative provision at The Link special school for three students.
- A small number of students in Key Stage 4 attend off-site courses at St Mark's School. These students are studying level 2 qualifications in product design, textiles, computing and business.
- The college exceeds the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The college has close international links with the Suzhou Foreign Language Schools in China and 20 Chinese students attend the college for two terms in Year 7. They have also developed strong cultural international links with Cordoba in Spain and the Comenius project which includes links with schools in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Turkey, Belgium and Germany, enabling students to travel to week-long conferences in these partner countries.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the progress and achievement of all groups of students still further, by ensuring that their different needs are fully met in lessons and through consistently high quality marking.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Students enter the college with attainment that is above average. Over time, students make sustained progress at a very high level through year groups, across many subjects, and do particularly well in English and increasingly so in mathematics.
- Overall achievement is excellent and has been sustained rigorously this year following a slight dip in some subjects for the 2012 GCSE results. This has been recovered very quickly through highly effective leadership, a relentless focus on the highest quality teaching and precisely targeted support for some students. The college's information shows that results which students have already achieved in monitored assessments in 2013 for mathematics and English have surpassed the 2012 A* to C pass rate, and are on track to achieve much higher than national average results in 2013.
- All groups of students produce excellent quality work. Higher ability students and those from minority ethnic groups, many of whom speak English as an additional language, make very good progress overall, and particularly in English, as a result of careful attention to their individual needs.
- The school is very effective in ensuring equality of opportunity for learning for all groups of students, including those who are disabled or have special educational needs. The students make excellent progress and achieve well as a result of teachers' high expectations for them.
- This year, governors have approved the use of the Year 7 catch-up premium and pupil premium funding to buy in extra staffing to support students who need more help in lessons. As a result, all these students have maintained very rapid progress, particularly in humanities, science and modern foreign languages.
- There is evidence to suggest that the gap in achievement between the small group of students known to be eligible for support from the pupil premium and the main student group is closing quickly and the college is engaged in careful monitoring and tracking of these students' progress. While their results at Key Stage 4 in 2012 were one grade below other students in English and mathematics, the gap is expected to be reversed in 2013; these students are predicted to make much faster progress than previously, with 66% on track to achieve five GCSE A* to C grades including English and mathematics, compared with 77% for the whole year group.
- The college areas of specialism promote particularly high attainment in performing arts and modern foreign languages. Some students are entered early for GCSE dance, music and drama in the summer term of Year 10. Those who gain A* and A grades go on to study AS-level theatre studies in Year 11. A small number of students also take GCSE Polish and Italian at the end of Year 9. The college started to enter students early for GCSE mathematics and English in 2013, with successful results.
- Some students who attend one-day courses at St Marks achieve very good GCSE grades, and other level 2 qualifications, and many go on to study A- and AS-level courses.
- Progress for the three students who attend The Link special school is monitored every term by the deputy head of school. They each have an individually-planned curriculum and progress reports are sent to parents regularly.
- Students read widely and write extensively across all subjects and apply a wide range of skills very effectively to ensure they are well prepared for the next steps in their education. No students leave the college without clear pathways that have been carefully planned for their future lives.
- The overwhelming majority of parents and carers who responded to Parent View agree that their children are making very good progress. One parent commented that his Year 8 child is 'constantly challenged and has been given many great opportunities within and beyond the curriculum. Particularly in maths, he has been given the opportunity to attend a university course as well as receiving work well beyond his years'. Also, discussions with students and

evidence from the inspection confirm that students achieve excellent results.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- In many lessons teaching is outstanding and teachers have very high expectations. Teachers routinely use information on students' progress well to plan lessons that challenge students and build on their prior learning. In these lessons, activities are well sequenced, imaginative and stimulate students' curiosity. Pair and group work is a strong feature in some subjects, such as art, where students are encouraged to learn from each other and work happily together.
- Students' progress in lessons is carefully monitored and the students are enabled to learn at their own pace through a range of different activities that meet their individual needs. For example, higher-ability students in a Year 9 history lesson looked at an overview of *The War on Terror* in the context of understanding international connections from 1979 to the present day and the challenges facing policy makers. Students were then offered a choice on examining, in small groups, morally controversial statements on conflict, for example 'one man's freedom fighter is another man's terrorist', resulting in some exceptionally high order thinking and associated discussions, teasing out insightful and deeply thoughtful comparisons. Students led the sessions, taking ownership of their learning and were engaged, mature and respectful of one another, resulting in outstanding behaviour for learning.
- Key factors in the outstanding practice are the high expectations and challenging targets set by teachers. In a Year 10 biology lesson on the structure and action of enzymes, the teacher enabled students to achieve outstanding learning through a 'speed-dating/snowballing task' that required them to track information provided by the teacher. The teacher's challenging questions probed students to extend their learning to the highest standards. Students then organised their own practical experiments and displayed excellent understanding in their interpretation of the results and explanation of why certain reactions had occurred.
- Teaching at its best is evident in the positive relationships between teachers and students which enable students to contribute effectively to the lessons. For example, in a Year 8 physical education lesson, the teacher provided a good learning atmosphere which engaged students and created interest and enthusiasm. Using her excellent subject knowledge, the teacher encouraged students to alternate between playing and observing, noting positives and areas for improvement in developing skills/tactics in football. The lesson had rapid pace, built well on previous learning and students fed back to one another to improve their performance. Students showed exemplary relationships for learning, resulting in outstanding learning and progress.
- There is strong evidence to show that some students who struggled with literacy in Key Stage 3 have been rapidly moved on through good and outstanding teaching. For example, in a Year 10 geography lesson, students were given support in practising how to write examination answers following a field trip to Swanage to examine sea defences. The teacher encouraged students to share their opinions in small groups and made good use of key words and appropriate language, particularly in supporting students who speak English as an additional language. Students were encouraged to substantiate their views, whilst also having good opportunities for reflection on environmental issues to take into account others' opinions. They were confident in writing detailed answers and their work was carefully checked by the teacher.
- A minority of lessons were not good or outstanding because teachers did not allow students to take ownership of their learning and had a tendency to talk for too long, and this impeded students' progress. In many lessons, teachers provide helpful comments in their marking, particularly in modern foreign languages. However, college leaders recognise that high quality marking and assessment should provide precise guidance on how to make even better progress. They are ensuring that, in all cases, marking is as good as the best and provides clear guidance to students on how to improve.

The behaviour and safety of pupils is outstanding

- Students' attitudes to learning are excellent, both in and out of lessons. There is a very positive atmosphere in the college and the quality of relationships is marked by respect and good humour. Interviews with students, teaching and support staff showed that this aspect of the college's life is highly valued.
- There is a cohesive pastoral team who know the students extremely well. Vulnerable students are closely monitored and their social and emotional development is carefully nurtured. Exclusions are very low and reducing rapidly over time. Attendance is broadly average and governors have approved the pupil premium funding for extra staff to promote higher levels of attendance for looked after children, students eligible for free school meals and children of service families.
- Students take great pride in the school and demonstrate that they have a very clear and moral sense of right and wrong. The ethos of the school was powerfully represented in assembly presentations by students as they reflected on their enrichment week experiences. These included trips abroad, working with a range of local groups, such as Year 9 students with a local special school for disabled children, and drama and dance workshops with the National Theatre and the English Touring Opera.
- Bullying is almost non-existent; students know how to keep safe whilst using the internet and confirm that staff help them to develop a clear understanding of the different kinds of bullying. School records confirm these views are accurate
- The college is strongly committed to international partnerships and considers it vital that students understand what it means to be part of a global village and to further develop their respect for other cultures. One member of support staff returned from retirement, stating, 'I wanted to continue my work with our arts community and international links, which I believe are a significant part of what makes St Gregory's such an inclusive, vibrant school.'
- The vast majority of parents and carers agree that their children are safe and that behaviour is very well managed.

The leadership and management is outstanding

- The executive headteacher provides outstanding leadership and his vision and energy are shared with the wider leadership team. He and his colleagues ensure that students have exceptional opportunities for high levels of personal as well as academic achievement. As a result, students are thriving, have a real commitment to their community and are achieving at the highest levels.
- The college has an accurate view of its own performance and senior leaders have focused on raising the quality of teaching with conspicuous success. Senior leaders carry out systematic lesson observations and hold teachers to account. Rigorous quality assurance, the impact of the two faculty specialisms and the innovative work of the learning improvement team are being used to drive teaching to even higher quality. Records show that the proportion of good or outstanding lessons is extremely high, with improvements across all subject departments and excellent lesson planning. The quality of teachers' work and students' progress is linked to pay progression and to the Teachers' Standards (national standards for teachers).
- The vision and drive of the executive headteacher and the head of school have been instrumental in implementing robust systems to further improve students' progress. For example, the college's tracking information for Key Stage 4 students is very well supported through the work of faculty reviews which analyse student progress data and set rigorous targets for high quality teaching and learning.
- Structures for developing staff are highly advanced through focused training programmes. Designated time is set aside to discuss best practice and to evaluate new ways of working. The college has funded residential courses as well as a master's degree course to enable faculty leaders to develop high quality leadership skills. Collaborative working with colleagues from other schools is a strong feature of professional development in preparing all staff for the new sixth form.

- College leaders have developed a comprehensive range of academic opportunities. There is a particularly strong offering of modern foreign language; students have the opportunity to study at least two languages including Mandarin as an option for all Key Stage 3 students. The range of lessons has recently been extended to include sports science and travel and tourism and the school benefits from an excellent link with St Mark's to provide students with a broad range of subjects at Key Stage 4. Humanities feature strongly and the college is on track to qualify as a centre for excellence through the Secondary Chartered Geography Mark.
- Sporting, artistic and dramatic opportunities are outstanding and all students take full advantage of the range of opportunities to develop clear, personal values and to make an impact on school life. Among many other programmes, the Duke of Edinburgh Award, the British Council Connecting Classrooms (link with Kolkata), debating and student-led assemblies give students chances to develop leadership skills. As a result, students have highly developed social skills and are able to work successfully on their own. Students speak very highly of the chances they are given to explore ideas and take part in activities beyond their lessons.
- There is an exceptional range of additional opportunities for all students to develop spiritual, moral, social and cultural skills both in lessons and through the wider curriculum. This is evident in all aspects of the college's life and features events such as fundraising for many charities and student conferences which are part of the European Comenius partnership with schools in Germany, Belgium and Italy. These conferences feature presentations by students which promote healthy lifestyles. Links with the Wellcome Trust have enabled students to participate in workshops on sleep disorders with Bristol Royal Infirmary, which they have gone on to share with other students as part of the Comenius programme
- Safeguarding arrangements are excellent. All strategies are in place and there are very tight procedures to ensure the safety of all students and staff.
- The overwhelming majority of parents who responded to Parent View said they were very pleased with the way the college is led and would recommend it to others.
- All staff believe the college to be well led and they take great pride in being part of the college community. One member of the support staff who responded to the questionnaire stated, 'The school's willingness to support my professional development is outstanding. I have just completed a psycho-therapy and counselling course which has enabled me to enhance my work supporting children and their families within the whole school community.'
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is outstanding. The governing body has planned meticulously to ensure that this Catholic college becomes a beacon of excellence in the community and has supported the executive headteacher and head of school extremely well. Governors hold the headteacher to account with regard to the accuracy of predictions for students' achievement, examination results, the quality of teaching and attendance. Governors have a very good understanding of data on how well the school is performing when compared to all schools nationally. They take up opportunities for training and have completed Raiseonline data analysis training. Governors have a firm grasp of the finances and of systems for pay progression and rewards for good teaching. They have a sophisticated understanding of performance management and monitor the targets for senior leaders. They have supported the headteacher in decisions about staff underperformance and promotions. Governors ensure that the Year 7 catch-up and pupil premium funding is well managed and they have a very good awareness of how to evaluate its impact on students' achievement.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	109329
Local authority	Bath and North East Somerset
Inspection number	412072

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	791
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Maggie Goodbody
Headteacher	Raymond Friel
Date of previous school inspection	24–25 September 2008
Telephone number	01225 832873
Fax number	01225 8358480
Email address	Raymond_Friel@bathnes.gov.uk

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