



St Cuthbert's Catholic Community College for Business and Enterprise

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 104835
LEA St. Helens
Inspection number 277230
Inspection dates 7 December 2005 to 8 December 2005
Reporting inspector Mr Leszek Iwaskow HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Berry's Lane
School category	Voluntary aided		Sutton
Age range of pupils	11 to 16		St Helens, Merseyside WA9 3HE
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01744 755186
Number on roll	892	Fax number	01744 29847
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Philip Swanson
Date of previous inspection	7 February 2000	Headteacher	Mr D Cairns

Age group 11 to 16	Inspection dates 7 December 2005 - 8 December 2005	Inspection number 277230
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

St Cuthbert's is a mixed Roman Catholic comprehensive college for pupils aged 11 to 16. The college is smaller than average, although numbers have increased steadily over recent years and the school is now over-subscribed. Almost half of the pupils are from non-Catholic backgrounds. Attainment on entry to the school is in line with the national average. Most pupils live in wards of high unemployment and deprivation and many are eligible for free school meals. A quarter of pupils have learning difficulties, and this has been increasing in recent years and is now above the national average. In order to support all pupils, the school has identified the 'Every Child Matters' agenda as a priority to address achievement, health problems and to promote economic well-being.

The school achieved Specialist School Status for Business and Enterprise in June 2004. This has resulted in some noticeable changes linked especially to work-related learning and partnership with business and the community. The school has its own on-site businesses which it intends to make greater use of to support this area of the curriculum, including a hotel, a catering company and a gym, as well as to provide extended school provision.

The new principal has been in post since September. The college has experienced some difficulties in appointing governors as well as recruiting sufficiently qualified staff in some curriculum areas recently. Staffing has been relatively stable with the school benefiting in the last two years from an influx of staff to replace those who have retired.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree that this college is a good school which is continuing to improve.

Pupils

progress well academically because the college has made great efforts in this direction, particularly in developing a curriculum more suited to their needs. Many enjoy practical activities and an increasing number of courses reflect vocational opportunities and support the business and enterprise culture which is being promoted. Examination results, in particular, have improved and the school is now concentrating on ensuring that all subjects of the curriculum are performing to a high standard.

The college is well led and managed and has worked hard to build up the capacity to improve even further. The college knows itself well. Strengths and weaknesses have been accurately identified and the college is clear about what needs to be done to improve provision further.

Care for pupils is a priority and this reflects the Catholic and Christian ethos which pervades much of the college's work. Pupils and parents comment positively about the

good care and support that the school provides. The pastoral system provides a cornerstone of stability which supports those pupils who need it, cajoles those who require it and praises those who deserve it.

The college serves the community well. There are very good links with local businesses, partner schools and the local authority. Parents and pupils are pleased with the improvements even though they recognise there is more that can still be achieved. The

college is developing into a focus for the community and is making a real difference to

the lives of the pupils and their families. It provides good value for money and is successfully raising the aspirations of many of its pupils, preparing them well for their roles in society and the world of work.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in literacy and numeracy to support learning across the curriculum.
- Make certain that there is a consistent approach by subject leaders in the development of their areas of responsibility, especially in those subjects which are still underachieving.

- Raise levels of attendance.
- Ensure that marking consistently supports pupils' learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The overall standards of attainment and rates of progress are good.

The majority of the pupils enter the college in Year 7 having achieved standards in line with the national average. Progress across Key Stage 3 is patchy; by the end of Year 9 standards in English are above average whilst standards in mathematics and science are below the national average.

By the end of Year 11, however, pupils have made good progress. The successful introduction of new vocational courses in science and information and communication technology (ICT) has had a major impact in the raising of standards. In 2005, the proportion of pupils obtaining five or more general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) passes at grade C or above increased to being well above the national average and this reflects a rising trend. Boys and girls make equally good progress and very few pupils leave with no qualification. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported well and also make good progress. There are, however, variations between subjects. The college recognises that standards in the core subjects of English and mathematics are below average and has introduced strategies to bring about improvements; an impressive increase in the proportion of pupils achieving at least grade C in English was achieved in 2005.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development is good. It has a positive impact on their achievement. In lessons, pupils settle quickly to work and respond well to the good expectations of their teachers. Behaviour around school is orderly; pupils are considerate and helpful to each other and visitors. Spiritual, moral and social development is strong and pupils' cultural awareness is growing.

Most pupils are happy in the college and enjoy coming to school. However, overall attendance remains just below average. Pupils particularly enjoy practical work and the broad range of sporting opportunities offered. They appreciate the inclusive ethos of the college which cultivates self-esteem by celebrating the talents and efforts of each individual. This is exemplified through the weekly Year 7 'Celebration Assembly' which is especially enjoyed by the younger pupils and they clearly delight in and are proud of their achievements. This also helps them to settle into the routines of the school quickly.

The large college council provides a useful forum for pupils to air their views. Pupils are being increasingly expected to have a real say in how their college develops. For example, pupils designed and planned the décor of the newly opened Community Learning Centre. Further development of the pupil voice is planned.

The house system fosters very good relationships and team spirit and provides pupils with opportunities to contribute to the wider community, for example, through charity fund-raising. Despite the school's efforts, many pupils still choose to eat unhealthily. The new, distinctive vocational curriculum is equipping pupils well for future employment.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The college evaluates the quality of teaching and learning to be good and inspectors agree with this judgement. There are many strengths. The implementation of national strategies has impacted positively on learning and the raising of achievement. Teachers have very good relationships with the pupils who are well behaved and willing to learn. Most lessons are well planned using appropriate resources and a variety of teaching methods. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported and as a result progress in line with their ability. The best lessons offer constant challenge and expectations are high. Learning is made enjoyable and pupils are enthusiastic, especially when teachers make the learning relevant. Pupils enjoy those lessons most where they have the opportunity to interact with the teacher and peers. They particularly enjoy practical activities and are uninspired on those occasions when lessons are dominated by teacher talk.

Assessment forms an integral part of this good teaching. The college assessment system is rigorous and consistent and good use is made of data to track pupils' progress and intervene when necessary. Targets are reviewed regularly and both pupils and parents are fully involved in review days. Pupils are aware of how they are progressing. They all carry personalised tracking cards which they delight in 'whipping out' of their pockets and their diaries to explain how well they are doing. They find this system motivational and are able to identify what they must concentrate on to improve. Frequently relevant homework is set, providing good opportunities for independent learning and to consolidate classwork. However, high quality marking and written feedback to pupils remain inconsistent across the school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The college offers a good range of subjects which match the needs and capabilities of all pupils. Many pupils are committed and involved in the many additional enrichment activities on offer. Statutory requirements are met. The transition unit based on 'Kensuke's Kingdom' enables pupils to make the step from primary school to college more easily. The 'Core' humanities and English programme in Year 7 encourages pupils to settle into the secondary school environment well providing a sense of continuity with their primary experiences. Gifted and talented pupils are identified at an early stage and there are extra enrichment opportunities for these pupils. For example, one

pupil represented Merseyside Youth at a conference in the USA and four made a trip to the European Parliament in Brussels.

Specialist college status has provided additional opportunities to further broaden the curriculum. In addition to more traditional subjects, a range of vocational and work-related courses has been introduced. The option system in Year 10 encourages pupils to choose a balanced curriculum to suit their particular needs. The college has addressed the need to develop work and life skills through an innovative carousel of learning opportunities. This allows pupils to be involved in a wide range of practical activities including the management and development of their own company (Guranga) selling Fair Trade goods. Pupils enjoy being entrepreneurs with an ethical conscience. Links with the community have been strengthened through the specialist college status and partnerships with business are very good.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The college provides outstanding care, support and guidance. Procedures to ensure health and safety are very good. Arrangements to support vulnerable pupils and promote child protection are outstanding. Links with primaries are extremely strong. The innovative 'Tuesday Club' provides an excellent opportunity for the numerous primary pupils who attend to familiarise themselves with the life of the college. This is exceptionally well supported. These initiatives also ensure that staff get to know their pupils very well before they start their new school. The college also supplements its own expertise by appropriate use of outside agencies.

Pupils rightly place a very high value on the support offered through the house system and feel safe from bullying and harassment. However, they would like to see better toilet and playground facilities. Pupils' pastoral and academic development is closely tracked. A broad range of intervention strategies, such as literacy progress units, is used sensitively to enable pupils to achieve well. Teachers make effective use of assessment information to help older pupils make informed option choices. Pupils know their targets and how to improve. Reports give parents and carers detailed and helpful information about their child's progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The inspectors agree with the college's own judgement that leadership and management are good overall. The principal and the head of college are providing very good leadership and are working well with senior colleagues to create a strong team. Together, they are meeting the many challenges the college is facing in its journey towards becoming a real centre for the local community. In particular, the recent restructuring reflects and supports the emerging business and enterprise culture which is now central to the school's philosophy. The small team of governors provide good support, know the college well and are prepared to challenge both the local authority and management in a constructive way when the need arises. There are good collective

partnerships being developed with both the local authority and other primary and secondary schools which support both the learning and care for the pupils at St Cuthbert's.

There is a clear and collective vision which places the pupils and community firmly at the centre. This is reflected in the overwhelming support of parents who approve of the direction the school is taking and the good start to the world of work which it provides for their children. This vision to create a school for the community is both challenging and exciting. The school acknowledges that it is 'only part-way through its journey' and that there is more to be achieved.

Middle managers are beginning to play a more active and influential role. The school recognises that some managers are initiating change more successfully than others. The recent restructuring and clearer lines of responsibility provide a good management structure to support everyone. The departmental self-review is now a clear and standardised process which helps planning for the future and senior managers are keen to ensure that good progress is being made in all areas.

The college makes effective use of the resources available. Classroom and corridor displays brighten buildings providing both a seasonal touch as well as a celebration of pupils' achievements. The college provides a good grounding for pupils and prepares them well for life in the outside world. The care and effort being expended in creating a 'college for the community' are well appreciated by the vast majority of parents and pupils.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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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	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

This letter is to tell you about our recent visit to your college to inspect the quality of the education you are experiencing. We particularly enjoyed meeting you and talking to you about your lessons, the activities you are involved in and how you are treated and looked after. What you had to tell us was very valuable and helped us come to the decision that your college is good and has improved in many respects over the last five years.

The inspectors were impressed with your behaviour during the two days of our visit. We know from talking to you and the teachers you are not 'angels' all of the time but you have great pride in the school and rarely let it down. You are good 'ambassadors' when representing your school on visits, the sports field or on placements in a variety of workplaces. You particularly enjoy lessons which allow you to work collaboratively and interact with your friends and teachers. Practical activities engage you and the school is continuing to change the curriculum to meet your needs. You will have noticed more vocational subjects are being offered and many of you see these as a route towards further studies when you leave St Cuthbert's. The teachers intend to take your preferences into account when planning their lessons to make sure that you make good progress, especially in the important subjects of English, mathematics and science. They intend to make sure they mark your work thoroughly so that you are clear about what you need to do to improve. In return they want you to take more notice when they advise you about eating more healthily. We know you like chips, sweets and crisps but, in your own interests, you should really take more care over your health.

Your parents are very happy with the education you are receiving and support the many changes that are happening to make your school an even better place to learn in and a real hub of the community.