



St Benedict's Catholic High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 112398
LEA Cumbria
Inspection number 278922
Inspection dates 25 January 2006 to 26 January 2006
Reporting inspector Mrs Janet Palmer

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Red Lonning
School category	Voluntary aided		Hensingham
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		Whitehaven, Cumbria
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01946 852680
Number on roll	1346	Fax number	01946 852684
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr John McCoy
Date of previous inspection	1 October 2000	Headteacher	Mr Mark Condon

Age group 11 to 18	Inspection dates 25 January 2006 - 26 January 2006	Inspection number 278922
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Her Majesty's Inspector and four additional inspectors.

Description of the school

St Benedict's is an 11–19 Catholic high school which serves a wide catchment area in West Cumbria with many pupils coming from backgrounds of relative social deprivation. It is a larger than average school, housed in modern accommodation with extensive grounds. There is a lower than average number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. It has been a specialist engineering college since 2002 and has accreditation as a Healthy School.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Benedict's Catholic High School is providing a good education for its pupils with some examples of outstanding practice. The school is well led by an effective senior team and governing body who together ensure they are providing good value for money and a capacity to improve. Planning is in place to raise standards, but staff at all levels need to ensure that their planning clearly assesses the impact of their actions and strategies.

Pupils make good progress in the lower school, particularly in English, mathematics and science where their results are just above the national average. They continue to do well in their GCSE examinations where results are good and improving each year. Pupils are confident and good natured and behave well in the classroom and around the school.

Pupils certainly enjoy coming to school where they are very well cared for, guided and supported and have very good opportunities to develop their spiritual, moral and social awareness. The overall personal development and well-being of pupils is a great strength of the school and teachers and support staff work hard to ensure all children feel safe and secure.

The quality of teaching is good and in some lessons, outstanding. However, a small minority of teachers need to improve the marking of work and managers need to ensure the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning in a few underperforming subjects is sufficiently rigorous.

The curriculum is broad and balanced and developing well to meet the needs and interests of the wide range of pupils in the school. There is an extensive and impressive range of extra curricular opportunities which pupils take good advantage of.

The school has many effective partnerships with local industries, colleges, universities and other agencies whose work with the school helps to raise the pupils' aspirations and extend their learning beyond the classroom.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The educational provision in the sixth form is good with well planned, challenging and enjoyable lessons. Results in 2004 were above average but there was a decline in 2005; however, standards and achievement are now at their former high level. University admission numbers went up from 49 in 2004 to 64 in 2005 and are rising annually. Three students were offered Oxbridge places this year.

The curriculum has a good range of academic and vocational courses with a strong programme of curriculum enrichment activities and many opportunities for community service and work experience. Recent changes in the management structure have led to much greater rigour in the monitoring and evaluation of all aspects of the sixth form. Additionally, new and robust systems to support students, to track their progress and to involve them in regular self-reviews and target setting are having a good impact

on their achievement and standards. Students feel that they are given good opportunities to take responsibility and to be independent learners. They feel well supported and advised and their opinions are welcomed and acted upon.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve planning at all levels to include precise criteria for measuring the impact of actions and strategies on raising standards.
- Improve consistency in the marking of work to ensure pupils have clear and appropriate targets for improvement.
- Ensure the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning in underperforming subjects are sufficiently rigorous to improve standards.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The school graded standards and achievement for pupils aged 11 to 16 as good and inspectors agreed with this judgement. Overall, pupils make good progress as they move through the school. Their attainment levels when they enter the school is broadly in line with the national average according to national data, although additional, reliable evidence provided by the school puts them below average on entry. National test results indicate that they reach above average standards in English, mathematics and science by the end of Year 9. This represents good progress.

Pupils who took the general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) examinations in 2005 maintained this good progress and attained above average results. These results continued the rising trend over the past three years. In 2005, pupils did particularly well in English, design technology, general studies and PE. They did less well in geography, but the entry number was small. The school's data, together with inspection evidence, show that nearly all pupils are now meeting, or exceeding target grades in geography. Overall, girls perform better than boys, as they do nationally.

In the sixth form achievement and standards are good. Results in 2004 were above average but fell in 2005. National data provided by the school indicates that achievement in 2005 was satisfactory; however inspection evidence of lesson observations and work sampling shows that overall standards and achievement are now above average. This is because the school has taken quick and effective action to restore them to their former successful levels.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The overwhelming majority of pupils enjoy being at school and their attendance is good. Opportunities for developing spiritual, moral, social and cultural education are outstanding. Very high levels of debate around complex issues indicate a high level of spirituality, whilst the huge range of projects and visitors that the school are involved with support exceptional development of the social, moral and cultural aspects.

Pupils feel very safe and secure whilst at school. On the rare occasions that bullying occurs it is treated very seriously by staff who are highly effective in resolving problems and reducing its incidence. The Christian ethos of the school underpins the very high quality of behaviour and relationships throughout the school. The counselling service is exceptional and has had a significant impact on pupils seeking help with problems.

Pupils' views are well represented through the highly developed school council. School council representatives take their role very seriously and are respected role models. Their views and those of parents and carers are listened to, resulting in, for example, improved toilet facilities and healthier school meals.

Pupils are developing an understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle and are beginning to make more informed choices about the effects of diet on health. A high proportion of pupils take advantage of the excellent sports facilities and the many opportunities for them to become involved in community activities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Overall, teaching and learning are good in the school and in the sixth form, with some examples of outstanding practice. The great majority of lessons are effectively planned and build well on the pupils' prior learning. Pupils are sufficiently challenged by the activities and most lessons are stimulating, lively and rewarding.

Teachers demonstrate high expectations of behaviour and standards and the great majority of pupils are eager, cooperative and well behaved. Relationships between teachers and pupils are mutually respectful and there is a purposeful working atmosphere in lessons.

Teachers show good subject knowledge and are fluent and confident in their delivery. They make good use of appropriate resources, use questioning effectively and help pupils develop their enquiry skills. Teachers know their pupils well and support those who need extra help. Those with learning difficulties and disabilities respond well to the targeted classroom support they receive from their teachers and teaching assistants. Good classroom displays enhance teaching and learning.

In most subject areas pupils' written work is well marked with clear targets for improvement. However, in a few subjects, pupils are unaware of what precisely they need to do to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum that is effective in meeting the needs of pupils. Specialist engineering status has enhanced the curriculum with increasing numbers opting for vocational areas such as engineering, business studies and electronics. Other initiatives include part-time college placements where pupils

undertake courses such as hairdressing, motor vehicle maintenance and catering, whilst others are given alternative curriculum opportunities which offer strands in job seeking and career planning.

There is an extensive and impressive range of extra curricular activities taking place during the lunch hour and after school. These include subject clubs, a debating society, orchestra, choir and band, drama productions, orienteering and photography as well as numerous sporting opportunities. The school has excellent sporting facilities including an all-weather pitch, football, rugby and hockey pitches, indoor and outdoor cricket facilities, netball and badminton courts and a cross-country course. Extra-curricular activities are very popular with the students who attend in large numbers across all year groups.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

This is an area of particular strength. The arrangements for transition from primary school are very effective, starting in each of the 21 feeder primaries from Year 5, helping pupils to settle in well and ensuring their specific needs are identified early.

Academic and pastoral systems work very well to identify pupils at risk of underachieving and a range of effective measures are used to help them. The schools' Independent Study Centre offers exceptionally good academic guidance and support. Pupils with problems are very well supported through the pastoral system and by a team of counsellors who deal confidentially with a number of complex issues. Access to careers guidance and support through the 'open door' policy of the Connexions office on the school site is highly valued.

Child protection procedures and risk assessments are thorough and effective, ensuring that pupils learn in a safe and secure environment.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The newly appointed headteacher offers a very clear vision of the future direction of the school. He is setting an agenda for radical change to ensure that the needs of individual pupils are met through the provision of a more personalised, stimulating and relevant curriculum. He is well supported by an able and experienced senior team. The drive and commitment to raise standards is shared by the majority of middle managers and, overall, the school demonstrates a good capacity to improve.

Planning for improvement is informed by the outcomes of realistic and accurate self-evaluation, based increasingly on the analysis of data. However, at subject level, planning does not always include precise criteria to assess the impact of actions and strategies on raising standards.

There are well established procedures for performance management, though systems for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning in the few underperforming subjects have not been sufficiently rigorous to bring about sustained

improvement. Most subject leaders are aware of their responsibilities for meeting pupils' entitlement to high quality teaching.

The school places high value on the support and care of all pupils in a Catholic Christian community. Gifted and talented pupils speak highly of the additional activities provided for them. Vulnerable pupils and those with learning difficulties are well supported. The school has done much to seek and act upon the views of parents and carers who express strong satisfaction with the quality of provision, particularly the emphasis on inclusion and pastoral care.

A committed and well informed governing body has overcome considerable difficulties to improve staffing and accommodation. Governors are very supportive of curriculum innovation but could do more to challenge the school over areas of underperformance. Good procedures for financial management, validated by external audit, ensure the school provides good value for money.

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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	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	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	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
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	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

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	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, through quality assurance and self-review	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

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

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St Benedict's Catholic High School

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25 January 2006

Dear Pupils

I would like thank you on behalf of the inspection team for making us feel so very welcome at your school. We appreciate the time many of you gave to tell us about your work and other activities.

These were the things that we found out about your school during our visit

St Benedict's is a good school, providing an effective education for pupils across all year groups.

Your teachers are very good at making sure you are well cared for and given good support to help you do your best. They provide very good spiritual, moral and social guidance and help you develop your understanding about other cultures.

You are well behaved, confident and mature and get on well with your teachers and each other. Many of you make a valuable contribution to the rest of the school and to the local community.

You have told us you enjoy coming to school and feel safe and secure and that on the rare occasion that bullying does occur, it is quickly and effectively dealt with by the teachers.

The school provides a very wide range of subjects for you to study, particularly at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, and many different extra-curricular activities which are very popular. Students at St Benedict's do particularly well in English, maths and science and results in the sixth form are good with many of you going on to study at university.

Your teachers plan their lessons well and find interesting and challenging activities for you to do. They have high expectations and most of you are keen and enthusiastic in class.

The school is well led by the headteacher and all the staff are working hard to ensure that you get the best possible education. We would, however, like to see the staff make more clear and precise plans about how they intend to raise standards even further in the future.

Most of your teachers mark your work and monitor your progress in great detail, but in a few subjects, you are not always clear about your targets. We are recommending that all your teachers mark your work carefully to ensure you know exactly what to do to improve. You can help them by continuing to work hard and listen to their advice.

I would like to thank you again for being so welcoming and wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Janet Palmer HMI

Lead inspector