



Saint Benedict Catholic School and Performing Arts College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 112973
Local Authority City of Derby
Inspection number 289477
Inspection dates 1–2 November 2006
Reporting inspector David Simpson HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	College address	Duffield Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Darley Abbey, Derby
Age range of pupils	11–19		Derbyshire DE22 1JD
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01332 557032
Number on roll (college)	1514	Fax number	01332 553032
Number on roll (6th form)	287		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr D Walker
		Headteacher	Mr C Reynolds
Date of previous college inspection	15 October 2001		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–19	1–2 November 2006	289477

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one HMI and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the college

Saint Benedict Catholic School and Performing Arts College is a larger than average secondary school. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is in line with the national average. The proportion of students from ethnic minority backgrounds is higher than average but the proportion who speak English as an additional language is low. Students enter the school with expected levels of attainment. The percentage of students with statements of special educational needs is high but the proportion of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is average. The school includes an Enhanced Resource Base which supports the needs of students who have visual or physical impairments. Over half of the school's students continue their education in the sixth form. The school has been designated as a specialist performing arts college for several years.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the college

Grade: 2

Saint Benedict's is a forward looking school which provides a good education for its students. It is distinguished by the effective care and guidance it provides. Students are well prepared for adult life and almost all of them move on to education, employment or training. Young people who have visual or physical impairments play a full part in the life of the school. Students' personal development is good. Their positive attitudes to learning make a significant contribution to their good achievement. They take full advantage of opportunities to make decisions and participate in a wide and varied range of activities. Performing arts specialist status contributes well to this, including opportunities to study abroad and participate in a major school production each year. The skills of the performing arts team are used well to support activities across the curriculum.

Standards have improved in recent years and are now broadly in line with the average performance of secondary schools by the time students finish their compulsory education. In 2006 the percentage of students who met nationally expected standards in end of Key Stage 3 national tests rose in mathematics and science but fell in English. The rise in students' average point score in GCSE or equivalent qualifications represents good progress. The school recognises that its analysis of the performance of groups of students needs to be more rigorous in order to identify priorities for improvement more promptly.

Teaching is satisfactory with some good features. When students are given opportunities in lessons to take the lead, cooperate with one another and to identify what they need to do to improve, they respond well and make good progress. However, the quality of teaching is too variable and often lessons lack pace, with students spending too much time listening rather than actively involved in their learning. The headteacher has a good knowledge of the quality of teaching and more key staff are now taking responsibility for monitoring learning. The school has taken decisive and effective steps to improve the quality of its curriculum so that the needs of students are well met and they consequently make good progress. Vocational courses in Years 10 and 11, and qualifications to meet the needs of young people who study in the Enhanced Resource Base, provide motivation and stimulate students' interest. The school has rightly identified the need to develop its Year 7 curriculum so that the skills the students bring from their primary school education are quickly built upon and developed.

The school has been well led and managed through some challenging circumstances. The headteacher is not afraid to take difficult decisions while fostering a culture of support and delegated leadership. Some staff have taken effective lead in the planning and introduction of curriculum developments and the house system. The latter is based on tutor groups which mix students from Years 7 to 13. It has established a 'family' ethos where groups of students establish friendships across the age range and develop a sense of responsibility as they mature. Students' behaviour has improved as a result. However, there is some inconsistency in the operation of tutor groups and the monitoring of students' progress towards their individual targets. The senior leadership

team has been strengthened over the last twelve months, monitoring procedures have been tightened and the school has a good capacity to improve. The governing body makes an outstanding contribution by closely scrutinising the school's work. St Benedict's has made significant progress since the last inspection.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Sixth form provision is satisfactory and good in some respects. The students within the sixth form have a wide range of starting points and generally make good progress and attain qualifications in line with national averages. The students enjoy their studies and appreciate the benefits of continuing to study in a school environment. For example, the house system allows sixth formers to take on extra responsibilities and support younger students. However, the school has accurately identified that the house system has resulted in the responsibilities of leadership and management of sixth form becoming less well defined and communication less sharp.

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall, with some good elements. In the best lessons students understand course requirements and know how to improve their performance. Where lessons are satisfactory there is less emphasis on supporting independent student learning. Effective monitoring of sixth form provision is developing and good practice is beginning to be shared. The school has identified the need to have a more rigorous approach to lesson observations in the sixth form. Links with external organisations are good for students hoping to go to university, as is support for their applications. The variety of vocational courses is developing and the school appreciates the necessity to extend this to meet all students' needs. The quality of the placements undertaken by students on vocational courses is good. However, sixth form work experience is voluntary and the uptake quite low.

What the college should do to improve further

- Ensure that students' progress towards their individual targets and the achievement of groups of students in national tests and examinations is monitored and evaluated effectively.
- Increase the proportion of lessons which are good or better by ensuring that activities are focused upon getting the students to actively learn.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management in the sixth form.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Standards by the end of Year 11 are broadly average, and students' achievement is good overall. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress, particularly in the Enhanced Resource Base. By Year 9 they have made good progress, and standards in the 2006 tests were broadly average when compared to provisional national figures. However, while students exceeded their demanding targets in

mathematics and science, they failed to do so in English. In 2006, a significant proportion of Year 11 exhibited challenging and difficult behaviour. Nevertheless, the school's robust and challenging targets were achieved. Consequently, the proportion of students gaining 5 or more A*-C grades slightly exceeded the provisional national average. Students' overall attainment exceeded expectations based on their prior attainment, and their achievement was good. However, some key weaknesses were identified. Consequently, the school now has a firm, and continuing, focus on ensuring improvements in English, mathematics and science. Overall, the processes by which the school evaluates students' achievement are not yet consistently sharp enough. In the sixth form, attainment by Year 13 students is broadly average. However, the average points score for students in 2006 improved, which represents good achievement given their prior attainment.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The students' personal development and well-being are good. Through the Catholic ethos of the school and the wide and varied range of opportunities provided for students, their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. The majority of students are well behaved and show respect to one another and members of the school community. They are articulate and well-mannered. In the mixed year house groups, older students provide effective role models for the younger ones and take responsibility for helping them to develop. They show good attitudes towards their own learning which results in good progress. However, some students do not take enough responsibility for some aspects of their education such as bringing basic equipment to lessons. Learning time is therefore wasted as teachers have to provide these. The adoption of healthy lifestyles is evident as students make sensible choices about what they eat from the wide variety of dining locations situated across the school site. They take an active part in the numerous extra-curricular activities that are available to them.

The school council is an active and vocal part of the school that has supported and appreciated the positive changes that have taken place within the school since the last inspection. A measure of their effectiveness was clearly demonstrated by their ability to raise funds for their Year 11 'prom' and the success of the anti-bullying council.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory with some good practice. Teaching is most effective where well planned lessons have pace and challenge and require students to be active learners. Clear time deadlines together with incisive questioning keep students engaged. The very good relationships between staff and students ensure that cooperation, and with it a good quality of learning, is maintained. Where teaching is less effective, it lacks this real sense of challenge and purpose and work is not sufficiently well matched to the different needs of students. Although teachers have good subject knowledge, too much time is spent telling students what to do or providing them with information. This reduces the opportunity for students to demonstrate their capacity as individual learners. Marking is too variable and does not always indicate what students need to do to improve. Behaviour in lessons is good with any minor incidents being dealt with quickly and effectively so as to not disrupt the learning of others.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The good curriculum is broad and enriching. It promotes good achievement and meets the needs and aspirations of the vast majority of students. The school has utilised its performing arts status effectively by providing an excellent range of opportunities for students to perform both in school and in the community. The school recognises that citizenship is not yet fully embedded in the curriculum and action has been taken to address this. The Year 7 curriculum has been reviewed and the school has developed plans to implement a more creative programme aimed at improving learning. Provision for students with learning difficulties and disabilities is well developed and the Enhanced Resource Base is effective in supporting students' needs.

The school has a wide range of options for Year 10 and 11 students. All students can choose from several vocational courses alongside more academic GCSE qualifications to match their needs and aspirations. This move has proved popular and has contributed significantly to raising achievement. Students benefit from well constructed work-related learning and further education links, which prepare them well for life as young adults.

Many students take part in the impressive range of extra-curricular sporting and other activities which enhance the curriculum and there is an extensive programme of visits and foreign trips, for example, to France and recently the United States of America.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care, guidance and support are good with some outstanding features. The introduction of the mixed age house groups has had a very positive impact on the behaviour of students resulting in fewer exclusions and a calmer environment throughout the school. The students are encouraged to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses. They are monitored by subject teachers who identify students that are causing concern. Effective intervention strategies within the house system are then used to address the needs of these individuals. However, too few form tutors are actively involved in monitoring the progress of individual students in Years 10 and 11.

Older members of form groups care for younger ones and initiatives such as a project to help students to stop smoking reinforce the healthy lifestyles options that are actively promoted across the school.

A very effective team has developed multi-agency cooperation to provide a real educational alternative for students at risk of long-term exclusion. The Enhanced Resource Base provides excellent support and provision. The career guidance is well suited to the needs of all students, is readily accessible and its high profile within the curriculum allows young people to plan for their future very effectively. Impressively, almost all of them proceed directly onto further education, employment or training when they leave the school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The leadership of the school is good. There are some excellent features, particularly in the way responsibility is delegated, and distributed, throughout the school which enables the professionalism of its leaders to flourish. This has led to some initiatives of high quality, for example, the development of the house system. There is a positive culture of looking forward, a commitment to improvement, and an expectation that ideas will be listened to and taken seriously. Management is good overall, but delegation means that some key information on performance does not reach senior management soon enough. The analysis of school performance data and its interpretation at whole school level require greater rigour. The tracking and targeting of specific groups of students, to raise their standards and achievement further, is not sharp enough. This has led to some of the school's own evaluations being over-generous. Nevertheless, there are excellent systems within the governing body to hold the school to account. Governance is outstanding because governors, collectively, have very positive contacts with the school and show clarity of understanding as to how it can improve. The positive working relationships between the school's senior leaders and managers are a real strength. Overall, there has been

good improvement since the previous inspection, and the school shows good capacity for further improvement, and continues to provide 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>	College 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	3
How well does the college work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The effectiveness of the college's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
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	3	3
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?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
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	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	3
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?	2	2

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	3
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	3	
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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	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

3 November 2006

Dear Students

Saint Benedict Catholic School and Performing Arts College, Duffield Road, Darley Abbey,
Derby, Derbyshire, DE22 1JD

Thank you for welcoming me and the inspection team into your school. We appreciated how you talked to us in your lessons and shared your opinions about Saint Benedict. We enjoyed the opportunities we had to see you learn, be involved in your assemblies and the discussions we had with members of the school council and sixth formers on Wednesday which showed what good ambassadors you are for the school. Your views and the views of your parents have helped us to understand what is distinctive about your school.

You've told us that the school is a place where you've played a major role in making decisions including being involved in interviews for staff appointments, making presentations to the governing body and helping in the training of midday supervisors. You also benefit from the many opportunities you have to take part in enriching activities, not least because you are a performing arts specialist college. Many of you participate in the annual school production and we know this year's work on 'Olivia' is already well in hand. You also get opportunities to perform in the Assembly Rooms in Derby, for headteacher conferences and to study abroad, for example, some of you auditioned and then went on to work at an American university. You make good progress and get to follow a wide range of courses and activities which are stimulating and interesting. You readily take on responsibilities, for example, as anti-bullying counsellors, and the house system helps all of you, regardless of age, to mix and look after one another.

You are rightly proud of your school and, just like the adults who work with you; you want it to get even better. You'll be pleased to know that our recommendations for what the school should do to improve further include that in your lessons you do even more of the work! In many of your lessons teachers help you to ask more questions, solve problems, take on more responsibility, explain to other students how well they are doing and what they could do better, and how you yourself can improve: we think this can happen more consistently throughout the school. From what we saw of your reaction when you had these opportunities in lessons, you'll enjoy the challenge and your progress will be even better.

Thank you again for making our two days with you so enjoyable.

Yours sincerely

David Simpson HMI