

St Benedict's Catholic High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125755
Local Authority	Warwickshire
Inspection number	302292
Inspection dates	6–7 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Clive Kempton HMI

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

Type of school	Modern (non-selective)
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	549
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Theresa Quick
Headteacher	Tim Sara
Date of previous school inspection	17 March 2003
School address	Kinwarton Road Alcester B49 6PX
Telephone number	01789 762888
Fax number	01789 400192

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of schools and two Additional Inspectors. A section 48 Religious Education inspection with two more Additional Inspectors also took place on the same two days.

Description of the school

St Benedict's serves a wide catchment area, including parts of Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Gloucestershire. The school is a maths and computing specialist college. It is popular and oversubscribed. The pupils have a wide range of abilities and needs.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

St Benedict's Catholic High is an outstanding school where all pupils thrive and achieve exceptionally high standards in a supportive family environment. One senior pupil said, 'The experience of this school is a journey; you develop as a person'. Pupils enter the school with broadly average attainment, so the high standards they achieve by the time they leave in Year 11 are testament to the exceptional progress they make as they move through the school. This is due to a number of significant factors, but particularly an outstanding curriculum with good and sometimes outstanding teaching, and the fact that every child is valued and incredibly well cared for, guided and supported. Every child really does matter at St Benedict's and the partnership of support between school, parents and the individual is very strong. Every child is known personally, no one falls through the net, and even in the most challenging circumstances, staff never give up on pupils but work tirelessly to ensure that they achieve their full potential. As a result, pupils speak of the pride they have to be part of St Benedict's. It is not just the inspectors who judge this to be an outstanding school, but also the many parents who wrote and spoke to inspectors during the week of the inspection, endorsing their respect and admiration for what the school does for their child, not just academically, but socially and spiritually as well. One commented, 'This is a wonderful school for any child'.

The personal development and well-being of pupils are also outstanding. The school is a truly unique, special place that sets it apart from many other schools. The strongest feature is the tangibly positive approach pupils have to learning. In lessons, in the playground, as they move around the school and in assembly, pupils noticeably display positive attitudes. It is 'cool' to achieve and learn here, and pupils as well as staff motivate and inspire each other to succeed. The strong Christian values of trust, respect and courtesy are evident from the moment pupils walk through the front door each day, where they are all greeted with a 'Good morning' by senior students. Pupils acknowledge visitors with eye contact, an uncanny polite confidence, and a sense of pride about their school that immediately puts everyone at ease. One experienced inspector commented, 'I can't remember the last time I smiled as much'. Pupils obviously enjoy school and want to come to learn each day, which is why attendance is so good, despite the long distances travelled by many. Staff obviously enjoy teaching here as well.

None of this happens without outstanding leadership at all levels. The headteacher is a highly respected figure within the school and the community, who leads with a quiet determination and purposeful vision. His spiritual belief of trust and respect permeates all teaching and non-teaching staff as well as the pupils. He is ably supported by a strong team of senior and middle managers who show great dedication and accountability in their roles. Because of the small size of the school, managers know the school well and informal evaluations are regular and accurate. This is partly due to managers' constant presence around the school, but also because of their determination to retain their teaching commitments. Whilst informal self-evaluation is strong, more formalised evaluation is not yet totally consistent across the school. One issue noted by inspectors would be to improve even more teaching to the outstanding category by ensuring all staff clearly explain what pupils are going to learn in each lesson and check that they have all learned it at the end.

The maths and computing specialist school status has had an impact across the school, notably in the cross-curricular use of information and communication technology (ICT). The published whole-school specialist school targets have been met.

What the school should do to improve further

- Devise consistent self-evaluation procedures for managers at all levels.
- Ensure that all lessons have clear and measurable learning objectives.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Achievement and standards in the school are outstanding. There has been a trend of consistent improvement over the last three years. Pupils achieve standards by the end of Years 9 and 11 that are significantly higher than the national average. Taking account of their broadly average attainment on entry to the school, this represents outstanding progress as they move through the school.

Pupils who completed their Year 9 national tests in 2006 made exceptional progress overall. Boys and girls performed equally well, as did pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities. Pupils performed slightly better in English than in mathematics or science.

Year 11 pupils who completed their GCSE examinations in 2006 also made exceptional progress. Standards reached were outstanding in nearly all key measures, placing the school in the 6th percentile ranking for all schools nationally. An impressive 88% of pupils achieved five A* to C grades. In this group, boys performed better than girls, with the majority of pupils achieving the challenging targets set for them. Higher-attaining boys and girls achieved slightly less well than other groups of pupils. Standards of pupils' current work indicate continuing improvement, with outstanding progress being made. This is a direct result of teachers' high expectations and commitment, coupled with the pupils' excellent behaviour and attitude to learning.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. From the moment that they are greeted by their peers at reception, pupils walk around school in a confident and co-operative manner. They enjoy their education greatly: 'It's a brilliant school', declared a Year 8 school council member. Pupils feel extremely safe and secure and are confident that any occasional incidents of bullying are dealt with highly effectively.

Attendance is good and pupils arrive at lessons punctually, with an eager attitude, ready to learn. Relationships within the school are excellent. According to the pupils, 'there's no division between staff and pupils'. Pupils are well aware of the importance of adopting healthy lifestyles, although a few choose not to, and they participate well in the wide range of sports on offer at lunchtimes and after school. They greatly enjoy the improved range of healthy eating options provided in the canteen.

Pupils appreciate the responsibilities they are given, such as serving on the school council. This council has contributed to many improvements to school life with the introduction of water fountains, summer uniform, lockers, benches and compost bins, clearly demonstrating pupils' awareness of the need to recycle. They develop an excellent awareness of the world of work through the well-delivered work experience programme in Year 11. This encompasses all traditional employment opportunities as well as the more unfamiliar, such as game keeping, air ambulance, sound engineering in a recording studio, working at the Eden Project, and the Royal Shakespeare Company. Pupils in all years benefit from Enterprise Days that successfully build upon prior learning. The wide-ranging SWIFT (South Warwickshire Initiative for Training)

vocational courses are exceptionally well tailored to meet the diverse, individual needs of pupils of all abilities in Years 10 and 11.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is outstanding. All take great pride in themselves and their school. Opportunities to take on responsibility and to expand their leadership skills are very well developed. Each individual pupil's skills and attributes are celebrated. Pupils truly appreciate this and say things like, 'I realise how lucky I am to be here'. All work co-operatively in groups and show great respect for each other's feelings and towards pupils with additional physical needs. Pupils have an excellent sense of right and wrong. They know and respect the school's excellent code of conduct. The significant fund raising for charity develops another aspect of all pupils' personal development.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall, with some outstanding features. In the best lessons, the brisk pace and strong intellectual challenge engage pupils' interests and enable them to participate fully and make rapid progress. For example, in an English lesson, Year 10 pupils applied previously taught skills of contextual analysis to understand the roles of key characters in 'King Lear'. A variety of 'bite-sized' activities, including video clips and personal diary recordings, sustained pupils' interest and enabled them to comment on and compare the morals and manners of Shakespearean England with contemporary life today.

Lessons are lively and pleasurable and there are very good relationships between the pupils themselves and with the teacher. The pupils respond well to direct questioning, supporting the brisk pace of lessons. The attitude and behaviour of pupils are excellent, often enabling the subtleties of a subject to be explored in more depth. Homework is well planned and used consistently to support class work, although marking is less consistently applied across subject areas as an aid to learning. Assessment data is used proactively as a tool to track pupils' performance. Teachers' good subject knowledge is used effectively to plan lessons, although the sharing of learning objectives with pupils varies widely between teachers. Opportunities to identify key skills and learning outcomes for different groups of pupils are occasionally overlooked. As a result, pupils are unable to participate fully in end-of-lesson reviews. Good use is made of in-class teaching assistants to support pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities, ensuring they can take a full part in lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The quality of the curriculum and other activities is outstanding, contributing to the progress and personal development of the pupils. All statutory requirements are met, including provision for citizenship. The school's specialist college status has led to improved choice and performance, with particular focus on mathematics and ICT. In Years 7 to 9, intervention programmes are well established to address the needs of lower-attaining pupils. The curriculum is inclusive, dynamic and flexible, focusing on personalised pathways to higher education. Partnership with local colleges ensures that there is a wide range of accredited courses suited to meet the needs of different groups of pupils in Years 10 and 11, including those with learning difficulties or disabilities. Higher-attaining pupils are entered for examinations early so they can take more subjects, sometimes as part of an additional curriculum programme after school.

A special strength of the curriculum is the wide and varied range of extra-curricular activities that involves every pupil in the school. Their horizons are stretched by a wealth of performing arts activities, clubs and competitive sports together with many off-site excursions, residential visits for whole year groups, foreign exchanges and trips, for example, to Peru and Uganda, which significantly contribute to enriching pupils' learning. A great many pupils participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme at bronze and silver level. The pupils also profit from on-site activities, including gifted and talented courses, special needs activities, pre-university courses where pupils' perspectives are widened, musical events and gala evenings, charity fund raising and regular house competitions.

As a result of this outstanding curriculum, all pupils are exceptionally well prepared for life beyond school. One Year 11 pupil commented, 'I have felt really comfortable at this school. It has prepared me well to step out of my comfort zone'.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The quality of care provided by the school is outstanding. Vulnerable pupils are monitored very carefully and there is excellent liaison with outside agencies.

The successful, integrated system of care ensures that there is outstanding communication within the school. Parents are fully involved and they receive regular, high quality information about their child's progress. All this means that pupils are very well known, monitored and supported, both pastorally and academically. Any areas of concern are identified quickly and dealt with very effectively.

Pupils know their targets and how they can improve the standard of their work. High quality focused support is given in a range of settings to assist pupils in raising their expectations and achievement. The much improved careers programme gives advice to pupils on opportunities when leaving school and raises aspirations for further and higher education.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The overall quality of leadership and management across the school is outstanding. The headteacher leads with tremendous vision and purpose and his experienced and impressive senior team complement his skills well. Together they form an individually and collectively powerful leadership group who share his determination and commitment. They believe in a visible presence around the school. They are accessible too; parents as well as staff commented on how they feel there is always an open door to see any of the senior team should they have a problem or concern. This strong team have ensured that the school has made good progress since the last inspection, and have proved that they have the capacity to make further improvements. The middle managers are equally committed, and support less experienced colleagues well. The annual review of GCSE results is a rigorous meeting between the senior team and individual heads of department, where they are held to account for standards achieved in their subject. Self-evaluation procedures have started this year but remain variable in quality between subjects.

Many pupils and staff are encouraged to become leaders and take on new roles. Ninety percent of Year 11 take on leadership duties as mentors, prefects, assembly leaders or Eucharistic

Ministers. Of note are the exceptional leadership skills of a central core of senior pupils, including the head girl and head boy. Another impressive feature is how some non-teaching staff have been given additional responsibilities, with the ensuing training, which has improved their status in the school and their own confidence and self-esteem. For example, some teaching assistants have developed NVQ Level 3 qualifications and have now taken on enormous additional responsibilities such as tutor, librarian, literacy co-ordinator, science teacher and senior teaching assistant trainer. The secretarial and site staff carry out their responsibilities very efficiently and for the greater good of the school.

Governance is outstanding. All governors are regularly involved in the life of the school. One example is their impressive involvement with individual departments and subject leaders. They show great commitment and dedication to their role and hold the school to account for standards achieved.

Parents and other external stakeholders involved with the school are overwhelmingly positive about the school and the impact it has on pupils. One commented that when she knew her daughter had initially secured a place at the school, she felt like she had 'won the lottery!' A local headteacher described the pupils as developing 'an inner confidence', and the staff as 'extremely hardworking'. There is a true spirit of collaboration, with support for the individual child at the centre. Everyone likes contacting and making links with St Benedict's, because they know it will be a positive experience. Things will happen. Issues, ideas and suggestions will be followed through, pupils will respond positively, and all will feel welcomed.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
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
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

8 June 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Benedict's Catholic High School, Alcester, B49 6PX

I wanted to write to you to thank you for your warm welcome when my colleagues and I inspected your school in June 2007. We very much enjoyed our visit, looking at your work, talking to you and your teachers and judging what it was like to be part of St Benedict's school. I thought you would like to know the outcomes of our visit.

- We think St Benedict's is an outstanding school and your parents agree.
- You show maturity in your demeanour.
- The vast majority of you work very hard and achieve high standards.
- We were very impressed with how smart you looked in your summer uniform, your manners, courtesy and willingness to talk to us.
- Your teachers and other adults work very hard for you. They obviously care a lot about you as individuals and that you achieve your full potential.
- Your headteacher and his senior team work tirelessly to make St Benedict's a special place.
- You have lots of opportunities to travel abroad and appreciate how some people are less fortunate than yourselves.
- You have many opportunities to raise money for charity and these are things that help you to grow into the confident young adults that leave the school.
- You benefit from extensive opportunities to learn outside the school day, such as clubs, trips and social events.
- You are all important and valued as individuals, whatever your needs. The school makes sure you all get extra help if you need it.
- The spiritual dimension of the school is strong, especially in the way you all respect and trust each other, adults and pupils alike.
- The leadership qualities shown by many senior pupils are outstanding. These qualities prepare you extremely well for your future adult life.

In order to make your school even better, we have asked your headteacher and staff to do the following things.

- Develop self-evaluation and checking procedures to achieve consistency in the school.
- Ensure that lessons have clear and measurable learning objectives.

Clive Kempton HMI Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools