

Saint Gregory's Catholic College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109329
Local Authority	Bath and North East Somerset
Inspection number	324951
Inspection dates	24–25 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Judith Rundle HMI

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 on roll	
School (total)	815
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Maggie Goodbody
Headteacher	Raymond Friel
Date of previous school inspection	15 November 2005
School address	Combe Hay Lane Odd Down Bath BA2 8PA
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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 Gregory's is a smaller than average secondary college with increased numbers this year. The college has a below average proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs. The numbers of students eligible for a free school meal or from a minority ethnic background are low. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is below average but increasing. The college has had designated performing arts status since 2002 and language status since 2006. It has gained the Inclusion Quality Mark, Healthy Schools status, Eco Schools Bronze and the Financial Management Standard. The college has retained Artsmark gold and the Investor in People award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

St Gregory's is an outstanding college where students thrive. The headteacher is outstanding in his leadership, and together with a strong senior leadership team has improved further an already good school. Monitoring of the college's work is rigorous to bring about continuous improvement. St Gregory's is a truly inclusive college where staff are fully committed to ensuring all students are not only included, but also flourish. Leaders and governors make incisive financial decisions, including the deployment of staff and resources. One parent summarised the views of many as follows: 'St Gregory's is simply the best school in every possible way. My children have gone from strength to strength due to excellent teaching and pastoral care. They are confident, capable and well rounded.'

A very high proportion of outstanding teaching occurred during the inspection, and overall teaching and learning are of the highest quality. The curriculum meets the needs of all learners extremely well, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Because of this, students make exceptional progress and attain very high standards. Students occasionally say they would like a more integrated approach between the different pathways of learning so they can work with a variety of their peers. Students say they feel safe in college, and systems to support their welfare and their personal and academic development are robust. The best marking is exemplary, although it is not yet all at this level. Students' spiritual development is particularly strong. Behaviour is exemplary in and around the college; students are polite and courteous to each other and staff. As one parent says, 'Our children in Years 8 and 11 are thriving in this environment both emotionally and academically.' Improvements since the last inspection are numerous. Examples include the second specialist status, more use of modern technologies as a stimulus in teaching and learning, a system of tracking and reviewing students' progress each term to ensure all are attaining to the best of their ability, and an improved environment promoting a calmer and more productive learning culture. The capacity to make further improvements is outstanding.

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the college, which has worked hard to ensure that parents feel welcome and involved in their children's education. Initiatives include the setting up of a parents' forum, learning skills sessions for parents so they better understand how to support their children at home, and English language classes for Polish speaking parents. Outstanding links exist with external services to support the needs of individual students, particularly the most vulnerable such as looked after children or those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The specialist subjects have a significant impact across the college. Specialist status was a driving force behind the personalisation of opportunities for students in the curriculum, enrichment activities and the introduction of the college's extensive work using 'the four deeps'. This enables the college to work successfully with identified students or groups of students for applicable deep learning, deep experience, deep support and deep leadership opportunities. The employment of specialist teachers in dance and drama has led to extended provision in performing arts and high levels of participation. Students have an outstanding range of opportunities to study between one and three languages within the curriculum, and can also take extra-curricular languages such as Japanese. Students have increasingly had opportunities to take other forms of accreditation in specialist subjects, including in leadership. Staff in specialist subjects take a lead in professional development activities within the college such as the use of information and communication technology, peer mentoring and the arts week,

leading to a greater range of teaching strategies in other subjects. Standards and achievement are high in specialist subjects. The good practices within specialist subjects are spread more widely through members of staff delivering professional development for other local authorities and presentations at national conferences.

What the school should do to improve further

- What the school should do to improve further
- Ensure students have opportunities to work with a variety of their peers irrespective of their chosen Key Stage 4 pathways.
- Bring all marking up to the level of the best.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Students enter the college at age 11 with standards that are above average. Although results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE examinations have been significantly above national averages for a number of years, students were making broadly average progress overall. However, during the last year standards by the end of Key Stage 3 and in GCSE examinations have risen even further. Results in external examinations in 2008 are well above previous levels. The proportion of students attaining five or more passes at the higher A* and A grades, including in English and mathematics, increased significantly. Results in almost all subjects were higher than in previous years and students made exceptionally good progress from their starting points. GCSE module results for students currently in Year 11 indicate that the high standards attained in 2008 are being sustained. Analysis of tracking data on students' progress across the college and standards seen in lesson observations confirm that the trend of significant improvement in standards and achievement is continuing. Students overall, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those from different minority ethnic groups, are now consistently making outstanding progress in their studies.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students show a real thirst for learning and take a pride in their work and their college. Students and parents speak very highly of the levels of support they receive from their teachers and other professionals. As one parent commented, 'Children are encouraged to develop all of their gifts, academic, spiritual, musical and sporting.' Students feel safe in college, where exemplary behaviour reflects the high moral values promoted. Attendance has improved steadily over the past four years and is now above the national average due to the effective use of strategies to address attendance issues.

Students relate very well to each other and their teachers, resulting in a very positive atmosphere both in classes and around the college. They reflect on the needs of others and are actively involved in charity and environmental work. Students are keen to take on posts of responsibility and there is a high degree of respect for these positions. Students feel listened to and they have initiated change through the democratically elected college senate. Cultural and spiritual development is exceptionally strong and students put into practice in their day-to-day work the values they learn in college. For example, they develop their spirituality through the outstanding chaplaincy sessions and their awareness of other cultures through events such as a recent Kathakali workshop.

Students are preparing very well for the world of work through the good guidance they receive on future study and careers, financial education and their strong literacy and numeracy skills. They are acutely aware of how to lead a healthy life and take part in a wide range of 'active' clubs.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Students are highly effective learners because of the extremely high quality of teaching across the college. One parent commented that 'Teachers inspire students and develop their confidence.' A high proportion of teaching is outstanding and the vast majority is at least good. In these lessons teachers use an extensive range of strategies to positively engage and motivate students. These include imaginative activities supported by the skillful use of questioning to develop students' ability to think more deeply about their own learning. Teachers' expectations are consistently high and lessons are conducted at a brisk pace. In a few instances where teaching does not involve students actively enough, students occasionally become distracted and lose their otherwise strong focus.

Teachers make good use of the 'deep support' analysis to identify students' needs and when planning work, and as a result students know what they are expected to learn and tasks are matched very well to meet their needs. Teachers use a wide variety of strategies to assess students' progress during lessons, enabling high quality feedback to challenge students' understanding of their work, sensitively redirect misunderstandings and help them improve further. The vast majority of lessons end with well planned reviews, including opportunities for students to reflect on their own and others' learning and to identify ways in which they could improve their work further. Although there is some inconsistency, the best marking thoroughly supports students' learning through recognising areas of strength and clearly identifying ways to improve future work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The college provides an outstanding curriculum. This starts in Year 7, using attainment data to ensure that students are in classes appropriate to their needs. This continues throughout the college when very effective use is made of tracking data to match students to appropriate courses, contributing significantly to their excellent progress, achievement and behaviour. Particular strengths exist in planning, evaluating and improving the curriculum, which are clearly linked to the college development plan and further personalisation of learning through the 'deep experience'.

Students in Key Stage 4 have outstanding opportunities to choose a pathway of learning, including a wide range of subjects and number of qualifications that meet individual needs very well, although one student did remark that 'we don't like having all of our lessons with the same group'. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive very good guidance to ensure they are fully included. Students are prepared very well for future progression, including in work-related skills through work experience in Year 10 and for a small number of students in Year 9. Strong links with the local further education college ensure students on the vocational pathway access the variety of provision to meet their needs, following excellent guidance from staff at St Gregory's. The specialist subjects feature highly in the

curriculum. Students in Key Stage 4 are expected to take at least one course from both performing arts and modern foreign languages; there are few who do not. Excellent opportunities exist for students to take qualifications early, including A levels, or to develop their skills in additional languages such as Japanese and Chinese.

The range and quality of clubs, visits and other out-of-college activities are outstanding and the level of students' participation is very high. These enrich students' learning and personal development considerably.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The college rightly prides itself on its outstanding care, guidance and support. Staff know their students well; students and parents alike see this as a key strength of the college. The college works very well in partnership with parents, who comment about the 'extraordinary feeling of care and friendliness' and a 'strong spiritual and family environment'.

The 'deep support' system to monitor students' progress is highly effective. A true partnership exists between pastoral and curriculum teams to identify, support and monitor all students. As a result, students know their targets and areas for improvement. They value the excellent support on offer to them both in and out of lessons. The college supports students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and vulnerable students very well with a range of effective, personalised support programmes. The recently refreshed house system has fostered a spirit of healthy competition among students and they relish the opportunities for additional responsibility within their houses. Primary links are a real strength and parents speak positively about the support students receive before joining the college. This enables them to settle very well.

Child protection procedures are fully in place and the college works with a very wide range of professionals to safeguard and support students. Risk assessments are thorough and effective practice in health and safety ensures a safe environment for all. Checks on staff are robust and meet government requirements.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher is outstanding in his leadership and vision for the college. Staff appreciate his approach to distributed leadership responsibilities and respond very positively to these opportunities. The headteacher and deputy headteacher work very closely together to monitor, evaluate and improve the work of the college; procedures for this are rigorous. A strong team of the bursar, assistant heads and heads of faculty very ably supports them. Together they have brought about the improvements to an already good school.

Senior leaders have outstanding knowledge of the college strengths and weaknesses and are unafraid to tackle difficult issues in order to bring about improvements. For example, a previous weaknesses identified in a mathematics review led to a programme of professional development and support that has resulted in improved teaching and students attaining higher standards. As one parent said, 'My children in college now have a very different understanding of maths than my eldest. Their work is of a higher quality and they enjoy lessons.' Senior leaders continue to set a clear direction for further improvements that staff and governors endorse. Governors

have a thorough understanding of the college's work and have increasingly undertaken a more challenging and critical approach to their role. They discharge their duties very well.

Heads of faculty and assistant headteachers play a pivotal role in evaluating students' standards and progress, identifying any underachievement and taking robust actions where applicable. The college uses its tracking and data information very effectively to set challenging targets for faculties and individual students. Because of these robust procedures and subsequent interventions, overall standards and achievement show significant improvement on previous years.

Community cohesion is a strength of the college's work. It has outstanding links with partner primary, secondary and special schools to promote work in specialist subjects, and with the Diocese to promote students' spiritual development. Students have a good range of opportunities to increase their understanding of global, national and local citizenship. Excellent links are in place to ensure parents feel included in their child's education.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

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/or disabilities make progress	1

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
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 learners' needs?	1
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

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

26 September 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of St Gregory's Catholic School, Bath, BA2 8PA

On behalf of the inspection team, I would like to thank you for your contribution to the recent inspection of your college. We found your college to be outstanding and I would like to share our key findings.

Teaching and learning are of the highest quality. You attain very high standards and the progress that you now make in lessons is exceptional. The tracking, target setting and review processes help you to achieve these excellent outcomes. We saw exemplary marking but it is not all currently at this high level. The curriculum is outstanding and meets your individual needs very well, although a small number of you in upper school do not always like having all of your lessons with the same group. The extra-curricular programmes offer you an outstanding range of activities and the vast majority of you take full advantage of them. You told us you feel safe and we think your behaviour in and around the college is exemplary. You have outstanding opportunities to develop personally and academically.

We found the headteacher to be outstanding in his leadership. He, with other senior leaders, has improved further an already good school. Senior leaders and governors rigorously monitor the quality of college work in order to bring about continuous improvement.

- Further to your comments and work that we saw, we have identified two areas for improvement:
- Ensure students have opportunities to work with a variety of their peers irrespective of their chosen Key Stage 4 pathways.
- Bring all marking up to the level of the best.

We would like to thank you for the courteous way that you welcomed us to the college and encourage you to continue to work hard. We wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Judith Rundle HMI