

**DENOMINATIONAL INSPECTION
REPORT (Section 48)**

on

**THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE
SCHOOL AND RELIGIOUS
EDUCATION**

School: St Benedict's Catholic High School

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School URN: 112398

Exec Headteacher: Mr I Smith

Chair of Governors: Mr W Slavin

Inspectors: Mr AJ Finnerty [Lead inspector]

Date of Inspection: 3rd and 4th July 2012

The inspection report is produced for the Rt. Reverend Michael Campbell O.S.A., the Bishop of Lancaster (c.f. Code Canon Law, 804, 806), and for the Governing Body of the school (Education Act 2005, Section 48). The inspection reviews, evaluates and plans further improvements in the school's witness to the Catholic faith and Curriculum Religious Education. This process begins with the school's own self-evaluation.

The inspection schedule follows criteria set by the National Board of Advisers and Inspectors.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Benedict's is a larger than average size high school serving a wide catchment area in West Cumbria. It operates a sixth form centre for over 200 students, some of whom join from the neighbouring St Joseph's RC High School. The overwhelming majority of students come from White British backgrounds. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is broadly average, as is the proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. The school holds the Study Support Award (advanced level), International School Award, and has Healthy School status. The school is designated as a Fairtrade school and has been a specialist engineering college since 2002.

FACTUAL INFORMATION

Pupil Catchment:

Number of pupils on roll:	1304
Planned Admission Number of Pupils:	234
Percentage of pupils baptised RC:	60.8%
Percentage of pupils from other Christian denominations:	37.8%
Percentage of pupils from other World Faiths:	0.5%
Percentage of pupils with no religious affiliation:	0.9%
Percentage of pupils from ethnic groups:	1.2%
Percentage of pupils with special needs:	2.2%

Staffing

Full time teachers:	72
Part time teachers:	22
Percentage of Catholic teachers:	38%

RE Department Staffing:

Number of full time RE teachers:	9
Number of part time RE teachers:	0
Percentage of Catholic teachers:	100%
Percentage of teachers with CCRS:	77.8%

Percentage of learning time given to RE:

Yr7	8%	Yr 10	10%
Yr8	8%	Yr 11	10%
Yr9	8%		

Parishes served by the school:

1. St. Mary's, Egremont
2. St. Mary's, Cleator
3. St. Begh's, Whitehaven
4. St. Benedict's, Whitehaven
5. St. Mary's, Kells
6. St. Joseph's, Frizington
7. St. Joseph's, Workington
8. Our Lady & St. Patrick's, Maryport
9. St Joseph's Seascale

Overall Effectiveness

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

2

MAIN FINDINGS

St. Benedict's Catholic High School provides a good Catholic education for its students and has earned a deep sense of loyalty from the young people and the families it serves. The school's distinctive nature gives a strong sense of identity which is critical in the period of regeneration into which it has recently entered. Standards in Religious Education are consistently good and the department shows good practice in listening to students, acknowledging their insights and seeking to cultivate their engagement with the religious dimension of life. This approach could be developed in many areas of the school to the benefit of all. Since there is a keen desire, which is evident at all levels of the community, to improve and to realise the rich potential in the school, the school's overall capacity for sustained improvement is good. The new direction of the school improvement path is clearly mapped.

Outcomes for pupils are good at St. Benedict's. Pupils benefit hugely from the Catholic character of the school and all that brings with it. Changes in staffing in the Religious Education department had led to difficulties in ensuring consistency of curriculum provision in the past year, but recent appointments point towards a continuing improvement in provision and outcomes for pupils. Relationships with students are good: "They never give up on anyone", as one student said. Since self-evaluation is realistic and determined, and since all plans for improvement and development are firm and carefully considered, the capacity to improve is good.

Leaders and managers are open and honest. They are informed by a shared understanding of the strengths of their school and the areas for improvement and are proactive in making the necessary interventions to improve the classroom experience of students. Although the plans for improvement are not yet embedded, the shared determination of staff and the high level of energy and competence shown by the current leadership ensure a good capacity to further improve.

Thorough planning for improvement in the provision of Catholic Education for students, coupled with hard work and determination of some key individuals mean that the provision of Catholic Education is now securely good.

For the school needs to improve further

- Clarify the Catholic vision of excellence in education as central to the regeneration of the school:
 - Provide on-going formation to all staff to ensure their confidence and capacity to model and share with pupils skills in leading prayer and liturgy.
 - Provide retreats and CPD opportunities, cultivate and embed – in staff and in students - a clear understanding of the Catholic faith and values to which the school is committed.
- Enable the student voice to be heard through active engagement and contribution to learning, liturgy and prayer.
- Review the role and character of the chaplaincy and make it an integral part of a cohesive whole school strategy. Provide realistic expectations for the work and development of the chaplaincy, staged over a three year plan.
- Ensure that the demands of the Bishops’ conference are met in terms of the provision of time for curriculum R.E.

PUPILS

How good are outcomes for pupils, taking particular account of variations between different groups?

2

Pupils at St Benedict’s make good progress in Religious Education from their arrival in Year 7 and through the following years of Key Stage 3 as the regular and structured assessment of attainment in RE shows. Many pupils express their enjoyment and appreciation of the quality of teaching in terms of the variety of stimuli and the leadership of learning given by staff. Positive appreciation of the subject feeds into substantial numbers opting for Religious Studies in Sixth Form. The progress and continued subject enjoyment of Sixth Form students is reflected in good or

satisfactory ALPS grades and in exceptionally high retained numbers continuing through to completion of A2 examinations.

Students speak highly of the care, support and encouragement provided by staff. Progress in Religious Education by the end of Year 11 does not yet fully reflect students' potential, nor the gains already made during Key Stage 3, but expected improvement across the school in literacy and English skills would help to release this potential. Attainment in Religious Education successfully maintained its quality at a time when there had elsewhere been a temporary decline. Those with statements of special educational needs make appropriate progress; despite targeted support students with less marked special needs make less progress. Students across all stages of the school express confidence in their knowledge of what they must do to continue to develop successfully in RE and to achieve or exceed their agreed targets.

Pupils at St Benedict's are used to daily prayer in form groups and to regular assemblies which have religious themes; their level of response is satisfactory. Some students write their own prayers and help in the preparation of liturgies, but most rely heavily on adults to arrange and lead Collective Worship. When members of the community are hit by personal sorrow or difficulty pupils appreciate the opportunity for intercessory prayer and value the way their concerns are brought into occasions of prayer and worship.

LEADERS AND MANAGERS

How effective are leaders and managers in developing the Catholic life of the School?

3

The leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school are satisfactory overall. The recently appointed executive headteacher has a clear commitment to the Catholic vision of education and recognises the distinctive Catholic character of St Benedict's. He has begun to develop a range of structural changes to enhance the Catholic life of the school and these are having an increasingly positive impact on the experience of pupils in and out of the classroom. These developments are not yet secure but the signs are encouraging. The committed head of Religious Education is energetic, organised and efficient; he leads his department by example.

Leaders and managers conduct a range of systematic monitoring activities relating to provision and outcomes. A classroom based data tracking system has recently been introduced across the school to inform teachers of expected academic outcomes for students and enable them to tackle areas of weakness. A high level of tracking had already been operating in the Religious Education department for some time and this has supported improvement of provision and outcomes for pupils at all key stages.

The governors now recognise the contribution they must make in order to both support and challenge the headteacher and leadership team. Along with the rest of the school community, they have the best interests of the school at heart but have yet to form themselves into an effective body. They have shown deep commitment and are determined to re-shape the way they work with the school to further its current process of change and improvement. The honesty of governors, and their responsiveness to advice given, affirms that they will play a crucial role in moving St. Benedict's into a new and increasingly hopeful phase of its life.

Effective partnerships with other providers and agencies are successfully fostered by the school's leaders and managers. They demonstrate the priority given to being a Catholic school by strengthening ties with local parishes and clergy who are actively supportive of the school. The well-established Confirmation programme is a fruit of this collaboration; its engagement with the Diocesan youth team based at Castlerigg adds a further dimension of partnership. Various departmental outreach initiatives and strong transition arrangements are features of the deliberately close work with feeder primaries in the local Catholic educational family. Important partnerships are also well-established for the provision of many kinds of support for students, some meeting their future career, further and higher educational needs and others providing extended support and welfare networks tailored to individual student pastoral, social or health issues. A visible outcome of all of this is that last year's leavers are all in education, employment or training – a most welcome success story for the school and its students.

The promotion of community cohesion at St Benedict's springs explicitly from the school's understanding of its mission to serve the Common Good. The chaplaincy team and local clergy successfully lead the school's participation in regular ecumenical prayer shared with local Methodist and Anglican communities. Such openness and tolerance is reflected in the day by day approach to prayer in school. Community cohesion is a well-developed characteristic of the school, also reflected in the widening engagement beyond the school with local Christian groups and a Muslim

prison chaplain. Community cohesion extends into local schools and draws on other educational establishments and industry.

PROVISION

How effective is the provision for Catholic Education?

2

The provision of Religious Education is good. The R.E. department and its staff are liked and respected throughout the school. Lessons in Religious Education are regularly planned and taught well. This good quality is reflected in student feedback, departmental monitoring and external observation. There is sufficient confidence in this quality for the department to be recognised as having exemplary value within the school. Students benefit from lessons in which the learning is carefully structured and well-resourced. Particular individual needs are known to RE teachers. The careful use of questioning to enhance individual and whole-class learning is embedded in the department. Further gains in learning could be made with the use of co-operative learning structures to secure maximum engagement, with students taking more responsibility for their own and others' learning. Students are already well-acquainted with the benefits of peer and self-assessment

Students in Religious Education lessons are well aware of the next steps they need to take to make gains in terms both of skills and knowledge. Formative and summative assessment are both well established and used regularly to enable student progress. Assessment for learning in lessons is developing through the routine use of peer assessment and mini-plenaries. Further gains would be possible with a regular expectation for students to produce improved responses following formative comment. Assessment within the department is given rigour by effective monitoring and guidance to staff on areas to improve their practice. In the tracking of summative assessment data the department has already been something of a beacon for the whole school in its systematic approach. This may in part explain the impressive progress made in Key Stage 3 Religious Education by pupils. The newly introduced whole school system giving staff access to data will enable this, and other target and group data, to feed directly into teacher planning and lesson construction.

The Religious Education curriculum has been developed to take account of students' needs. High quality schemes of work are in place for all key stages and resources are varied and suitable. The department has worked hard to incorporate a wider range of the active engagement techniques,

which students say they prefer and enjoy, than is common elsewhere in the school. There is room for this area to develop further. The respect and concern teachers have for students ensure positive relationships and engagement in lessons. The department works closely with the chaplaincy and Religious Education and plays a vital part in the religious, spiritual and moral formation of students.

The recommendations of the Bishops' Conference with respect to curriculum time are honoured in year 7 and in years 10 and 11, but not in years 8 and 9.

The quality of Collective Worship is generally good. Collective worship is well prepared by the chaplain who provides staff and students with appropriate resources and stimulating material. Staff feel well supported and are positive about playing a role in the worship of the community, but their formation requires more attention to allow them to model outstanding practice to pupils. All the priests from local parishes serve the community and Mass is celebrated each week in the school chapel. High profile is given within the school to the liturgical calendar, and feast days are celebrated appropriately. There is a thirst on the part of students for the spiritual provision to be further extended, especially in opportunities for retreats and days of reflection.

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

Key for inspection grades:

Grade 1 **Outstanding** Grade 2 **Good** Grade 3 **Satisfactory** Grade 4 **Unsatisfactory**

Overall effectiveness	2
The school's capacity for sustained improvement	2
How good are outcomes for pupils, taking particular account of variations between different groups?	2
• how well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education?	2
❖ the quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
❖ the quality of learning for pupils with particular learning needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
❖ pupils' attainment in RE	2
• to what extent do pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life of the school?	2
• how well do pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship?	3
How effective are leaders and managers in developing the Catholic life of the School?	3
• how well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life of the school and plan improvement to outcomes for pupils?	3
• how well leaders and managers monitor and evaluate the provision for RE and plan for improvement to outcomes for pupils?	2
• the extent to which the governing body provides effective challenge and support for the Catholic dimension of the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory and canonical responsibilities met?	3
• how well leaders and managers develop partnerships with other providers, organisations and services in order to promote Catholic learning and well being?	3
• how effectively leaders and managers promote Community Cohesion.	1
How effective is the provision for Catholic Education?	2
• the quality of teaching and purposeful learning in Religious Education?	2
• the effectiveness of assessment and academic guidance in Religious Education?	2
• the extent to which Religious Education curriculum meets pupils' needs?	2
• the quality of Collective Worship provided by the school?	2