



DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD

Denominational (S48) Inspection Report

Name of School: St Benedict's Catholic College
Local Authority: Essex County Council

Inspection Date: 11 March 2022

Reporting Inspector: Tom Cahill (Lead Inspector)
Damian Fox (Associate Inspector)

This Inspection was carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005 and 2011.

Type of School:	Secondary	School Address:	Norman Way
School Category:	Comprehensive		Colchester
Age range of pupils:	Voluntary Aided		Essex
Gender of pupils:	11-16		CO3 3US
Number on roll:	Mixed	Tel. No.	01206 549222
Appropriate Authority:	880	Headteacher:	Mrs J Santinelli
Date of previous inspection:	The Governing Body	Chair of Governors:	Mrs M Moriarty
	23 April 2015		

Information about the school

St Benedict's Catholic College is a Voluntary Aided 11-16 school located in the county of Essex and within the diocese of Brentwood. It serves 4 Catholic primary schools 2 of which are close to the school. It also serves numerous other schools in a large catchment area of Essex covering almost 400 square miles. There are currently 880 students on roll of which 60% are baptised Catholics. The majority of the other students are Christian or members of other world faiths. The school is heavily oversubscribed. About 60% of students are of White British heritage with a growing percentage coming from minority ethnic groups. The prior attainment of students on entry to the school is slightly above average. The percentage of students whose first language is not English is 18%. The percentage of students with special educational needs who have an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) is 2% which is below the national average. Approximately 20% of the students are entitled to Pupil Premium funding which is just below the national average. There are 44.1 FTE. teachers of whom 40% are Catholic and 3 hold the CCRS. The school ensures 10% of curriculum time is devoted to teaching Religious Education in line with recommendations from the Bishops' Conference.

Key grades for inspection

1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 1

St Benedict's is an outstanding Catholic school having continued to improve since the last inspection in 2015. These improvements are a result of outstanding leadership at all levels within the school community. The school provides exceptional care and support for students who thrive in this highly inclusive multifaith community which has Christ at the centre of all its work. Good teaching allows all students to make good progress supported by the very strong behaviour for learning shown by the students in their Religious Education lessons. The faith journey of students is further enhanced by outstanding provision for collective worship as a result of careful planning and evaluation by senior leaders supported by the Chaplain to which students respond positively with great respect and high levels of engagement.

What the school should do to improve further:

- Continue to improve the quality of teaching so the majority is outstanding to allow students to make outstanding progress and achieve outstanding outcomes in Religious Education.
- Provide opportunities for students to visit local places of worship for other world faiths which they study as part of the Religious Education Curriculum offered by the school.

CATHOLIC LIFE

Grade 1

Catholic life at the school is outstanding in all key areas. As a result, students thrive in an exceptionally caring and highly inclusive community where everyone is respected. The strong and all-pervading Catholic ethos is underpinned by highly positive and supportive relationships between all members of the school community, whether students or staff. Students spoke to inspectors warmly about the fact they feel part of a special family at St Benedict's where bullying and discrimination of any sort is simply not accepted.

Students respond very positively to the high expectations of the school. They are clearly proud to be part of the St Benedict's school community and wear their uniform with pride. They are outstanding ambassadors for the school. They are both compassionate towards each other and passionate about helping others. These values are openly fostered by the school where as one member of staff said "respect is non-negotiable". The Vice Principal has championed the motto 'Strive for excellence in all we do' which is taken directly from the College prayer and is displayed around the school and in the student's planner as is the Rule of St Benedict. The planner also includes many Catholic prayers and the weekly gospel readings to support prayer and worship at the school. Students take the lead in raising significant funds and resources for those in need. This includes goods for the Colchester Food Bank, CAFOD and the annual Christmas shoebox appeal. They have also raised funds for 'Young Minds', a charity that focuses on the mental health of young people. The school has also supported 'Beacon House' a local charity for the homeless as well as a number of charities supporting refugees. In the case

of the latter, a past student is nationally known for her passion for helping refugees both in Calais and those fleeing war and poverty in the Mediterranean. Students are currently raising funds to support a past student suffering from a life-threatening cancer.

Students are encouraged to take responsibility by becoming prefects and members of the chaplaincy team. There is also an active Justice and Peace group and 2 school choirs. The school also has a number of support groups that are valued by a wide range of students who believe that this approach helps to reinforce the highly inclusive nature of the school. Students also spoke enthusiastically of their involvement in Black History month and students, through Student Voice prepared and delivered assemblies on the theme which were very well received by the whole of the school community.

Parents are very positive about the school and responded in high numbers to the online questionnaire provided at the time of the inspection. They are kept well informed about Catholic life through regular newsletters and social media expertly curated and managed by the school. Many mentioned how much they appreciate staff going the extra mile to encourage and guide their children throughout their time at the school. As one parent wrote "St Benedict's promotes excellent values and morals. The children understand the importance of treating each other with respect and courtesy and there is a very positive atmosphere within the school. Another wrote "St Benedict's Catholic College is our family and we give grateful thanks for the work that is done in all aspects". The vast majority of parental responses were of a similar tone.

The current and very experienced consultant Chaplain has only been in post since last September but is having a very positive impact on Catholic life at the school and is a great support to both students and staff. The school is reviewing Chaplaincy provision following the retirement of a long serving Chaplain and they are being well supported in this review by the consultant Chaplain currently fulfilling the role. The school is thinking creatively about the future of Chaplaincy provision as many schools are finding it very difficult to recruit to this role.

The Principal, the Vice Principal, other senior leaders and her staff are all excellent role models for the young people in their school. The Principal, and governors have a clear vision which is shared by everyone in the school community. This reflects the motto of the school 'Ora et Labora' where staff and pupils pray together as well as working hard together guided by Christ who lies at the centre of this thriving faith community. The school also successfully strives to support the common good and works closely with other schools including faith and non-faith schools. Leaders and governors have also generously supported other schools in difficulty by sharing good practice and providing guidance and training to these schools and should be commended for this support.

The school enjoys the support and encouragement of an experienced and committed governing body which is chaired by a long serving and skilled governor. Governors know their school well and provide just the right blend of support and challenge. They are fully committed to developing further the Catholic life of the school and feel welcomed on their regular visits to the school.

The newly refurbished school chapel, the chapel garden and the new outdoor classroom area are all excellent spaces for students and staff to pray and reflect. The school also has an old chapel bell located at the front of the school which rings on the hour and is used in May and October to ring for the Angelus. The school also has the hall for Mass and assemblies and the sports hall which can accommodate a whole school Mass. The school proudly proclaims its Catholic heritage and has many beautiful icons around the school and each classroom has a focus for prayer. Together, all these aspects provides a prayerful atmosphere which greatly supports the Catholic life of the school which in turn supports the students in their faith journey.

Prior to the pandemic, the school offered a range of retreat opportunities for students. The school has plans to return to the programme of retreats as soon as conditions allow including use of local parishes and Walsingham residential retreat centre and the National Holocaust Centre as well as the annual Year 7 Mersea Camp. Another notable feature of the school showing its commitment to developing the Catholic life is the annual residential retreat offered to all staff with costs covered by the school. Staff at the school feel well supported by senior leaders and indeed many opt to send their own children to the school which one member of staff described as "as a place of love and learning "while another said the school was "a wonderful witness to the charism and teaching of St Benedict and "students and staff can make mistakes but we are forgiven, that we see Christ in others, that is what we model".

Students enjoy their Religious Education lessons and their very good behaviour for learning enables them to make good progress. They take pride in their work as seen by the high standards of presentation in their workbooks which are regularly marked by their teachers. Students with SEN and those who qualify for Pupil Premium funding make at least similar progress and achieve similar attainment compared to other students. Some more able students achieve outstanding progress and attainment but more students are capable of achieving these higher levels.

Inspectors believe that the changes to GCSE courses outlined below, as well as the new and challenging bespoke key stage 3 course designed by the school will allow all students to achieve their full potential whilst ensuring courses reflect the requirements outlined in the curriculum directory.

Students spoke positively and warmly about their Religious Education teachers and how hard they work to make lessons interesting and relevant as well as challenging and go to great lengths to support them. They enjoy participating in peer marking and fully understand the assessment processes operated by the department.

In the most effective lessons seen during the inspection, pupils were very enthusiastic, engaged in their learning and displayed a curiosity and thirst for knowledge as they keenly debated St Augustine's teaching about evil. Students will often go home and discuss with their families what they have discovered and learnt in their Religious Education lessons and most parents have a good understanding of course content and impact of what is being taught. As one parent wrote "The Religious Education offered by St Benedict's has made a huge positive impact in my children's moral way of life and I love that."

Religious Education teachers work very hard to ensure their lessons meet the needs of all the students. Currently at least 12 teachers assist in teaching Religious Education, made necessary by the impact of the pandemic and the need to keep year groups separate. It has also resulted in some classes having 2 teachers for Religious Education during the 2 week timetable the school operates. The school has sufficient specialist teachers to meet the demands of the timetable and the school will review staffing when conditions allow. Non specialists are very well supported through a central bank of lesson plans available to them which can easily be adjusted to meet the needs of the students they teach whether in mixed ability groups at Key Stage 3 or in sets at Key Stage 4. Teaching is good overall with some outstanding features and the department has the capacity and commitment to deliver even more outstanding teaching in the future as the new courses match better the needs of all students.

Leadership and management of Religious Education at the school is outstanding. The inspirational subject leader has worked hard since her appointment to bring about significant improvement in teaching and student outcomes since the last inspection. She has driven up standards and raised expectations of both students and staff and Religious Education is now a thriving core subject at the heart of the school's curriculum. The Religious education department is quite rightly seen as a leading department in the school for curriculum innovation and design and the use of ICT especially for delivering remote learning during the recent pandemic. She has correctly identified the need to change to a more appropriate course at GCSE. The current Year 10 students are now following the Eduqas Religious Education Syllabus A which includes Catholic Christianity and Judaism and the more integrated nature of the course better suits the needs of the students. As mentioned above, Inspectors believe this will allow the current upward trend of student progress and attainment to continue and so progress and attainment of all students is outstanding overall.

The school leadership team and governors are very supportive of the Religious Education department. The department is very well funded and enjoys specialist teaching spaces and a resource base. Classrooms are bright, clean and display is of a very high standard with each classroom having a focus for prayer. The department enjoys the benefit of having class sets of iPads as well as more recently headsets which support virtual reality learning. The school has also invested heavily in laptops for students at Key Stage 4 and again this will enhance their learning experience within Religious Education Lessons. The department has also been able to provide new text books to meet the demands of the new course at GCSE. The commitment of leaders and governors can be seen as the school now offers a full 10% of curriculum time for Religious Education which is a further improvement since the last inspection.

Collective worship is outstanding in most aspects. As a result, students respond positively and with deep respect during times of collective worship and it clearly has an impact on their moral compass and values.

Students and staff enjoy a wide range of opportunities to worship together although during the recent pandemic, these opportunities were restricted. However, the school has worked tirelessly to ensure students and staff have had many opportunities to worship together during this time through the use of remote technology and smaller gatherings. A voluntary Mass is celebrated by a local priest every Wednesday morning in the recently refurbished chapel. The chapel offers a warm and welcoming place even though refurbishment work has yet to be completed. The designs for the new crucifix, altar and new stained-glass windows will further enhance the prayerful and peaceful atmosphere of the chapel. The Blessed Sacrament will continue to be reserved in the Chapel once refurbishment work has been completed.

The impact of the Chapel and the quality of collective worship was seen during the inspection which took place during the season of Lent. All form groups are offered the opportunity to follow the Stations of the Cross during Lent. In a Year 7 service seen during the inspection, the students were skilfully guided through each Station by the Chaplain. Students were actively involved through readings and prayer. Students were highly respectful and their behaviour was excellent. The whole experience was meticulously planned to ensure students could immerse themselves in the story of Christ's crucifixion.

The quality of collective worship at the school is also outstanding. Senior Leaders support the Chaplain to plan celebrations in great detail to ensure maximum impact on the students and to ensure they are conducted in a prayerful and respectful manner. There is a full calendar of Masses and non-liturgical celebrations which follow the Church's calendar. In addition, there is the annual celebration on the Feast of St Benedict as well as Form and Year Masses and weekly assemblies for all year groups. Collective worship also takes place every morning in Form time often led by students or using resources provided by the Chaplain.

The high quality of collective worship offered was also clearly seen in a Year 7 assembly which was seen during the inspection when the theme of International Women's Day was celebrated. The teacher leading the assembly skilfully displayed images of well-known women inviting the students to identify each one. Also included were past students who had achieved special status. Mary was also highlighted as the mother of Christ and the fact she was with him to the very end of his suffering. The assembly moved onto the current conflict in the Ukraine with the image of a teacher who herself had been badly injured during the first weeks of the conflict. Students were invited to reflect on the discrimination and hardship women often face. At the end of the assembly, a member of the support staff who came from Ukraine was invited to accept some flowers to show the appreciation of the school community for her efforts to collect clothing and essential items for those suffering in Ukraine. Students and staff were clearly moved by the assembly and the poignant point that some students and staff at the school were from the Ukraine. Pupils were involved in the assembly through questions and reading and prayer and were very respectful and prayerful throughout and understood at the end of the assembly that in any conflict, the general population of each country on either side of the conflict are the innocent ones who suffer most.

Leaders and managers monitor and evaluate collective worship on a regular basis. All major forms of collective worship are evaluated to see how they could be improved further. Senior leaders and governors have a high profile around the school and the latter are regular visitors to the school. The Principal provides termly reports to the governing body on Catholic life and meets weekly with the Chaplain.