



## INSPECTION REPORT

### **St Bede's Catholic College**

Lawrence Weston, Bristol

BS11 0SU

Telephone: 0117 3772200

E-mail address: [contact@stbedesc.org](mailto:contact@stbedesc.org)

DfE Number: **137627**

Principal: Ms C Hughes

Chair of Governors: Fr M McAndrew

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Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the Diocese of Clifton  
and inspection of Denominational Education under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

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Date of inspection: 29<sup>th</sup>- 30<sup>th</sup> January 2015  
Date of previous inspection: 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> June 2007

Reporting Inspector: Mrs A Barrett  
Additional Inspector: Mr J Skivington

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## Description of School

St Bede's is an average sized 11-18 mixed Catholic comprehensive academy within the Diocese of Clifton, serving the Catholic community within a radius of 25 miles. The majority of pupils come from 11 partner primary schools in Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire. The college is regularly over-subscribed. There are currently 1018 on roll, of whom 108 are in the newly established 6<sup>th</sup> form which started in September 2013. The proportion of baptised Catholics is 90% overall, with 93% in years 7 to 11. The majority of students are from White British backgrounds, with many minority ethnic groups represented. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is above the national average, as is the percentage of students who speak English as an additional language. Nearly 30 different languages are spoken by pupils in their homes. The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is well below the national average. The proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also well below the national average. The Principal is a National Leader of Education. The Principal and her colleagues provide support to other local schools across the primary and secondary phase.

### Key for inspection grades

Grade 1: Outstanding; Grade 2: Good; Grade 3: Requires improvement in order to be good;  
Grade 4: Inadequate

## Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school (summary statement)

**Grade 1**

This is an outstanding school because:

- governors and all leaders are fully committed to the pursuit of excellence, working together as a highly effective team to ensure that the promotion of the school's Catholic life is at the centre of all that it does
- the Principal has been instrumental in creating a culture of building on and improving the school's Catholic life at every level, with attention to detail being a particular strength. She provides clear, focused and inspirational leadership with an unequivocal commitment to the pursuit of excellence in promoting the Catholic mission of the college and high academic standards overall
- students are extremely proud of their Catholic school and wholeheartedly embrace the many opportunities provided for all to grow in faith and gain a secure understanding of the impact of faith on their lives
- the college is highly regarded by parents and considered to be a beacon of excellence. This is due in no small measure to the relentless focus on the pursuance of high standards by the Principal and her leadership team
- the quality of teaching in RE is consistently good with outstanding features, promoting purposeful learning and high levels of achievement across the key stages
- the head of RE leads a well-qualified team who are highly regarded by students.

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## **The capacity of the school community to improve and develop**

- The last diocesan inspection in 2007 rated the school outstanding and this remains the case.
- Excellent progress has been made in addressing all of the issues highlighted in the last inspection.
- Leadership and governance are highly effective in promoting, monitoring and evaluating both the provision for the Catholic life of the school and religious education and have the full support of staff, parents and students.

## **What the school should do to improve further**

- Develop chaplaincy further by setting up a whole school team consisting of pupil and staff representatives from across the key stages, faculties and leadership team.
- Record and build on the excellent provision for spiritual, moral, social, cultural and vocational development by mapping and monitoring opportunities across the curriculum.

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

**Grade 1**

Students are extremely proud of their Catholic school and wholeheartedly embrace the many opportunities provided for all to grow in faith and gain a secure understanding of the impact of faith on their lives. They demonstrate a clear understanding and ability to speak with confidence about the school's distinctive Catholic nature. One student, summarising the views of others explained that 'None of us is afraid of our religion with each of us having a voice - students who are not Catholic feel at home here and are happy to share their beliefs'. Students have a strong sense of identity and awareness that they are part of a Catholic community which has a responsibility to care for others of any faith and none. They enthusiastically promote the work of Catholic organisations, such as CAFOD, through leading assemblies and regular fundraising events and running a weekly Fair Trade stall. Sixth form students speak highly about their involvement in, and quality of, diocesan conferences where they are able to meet and share ideas with students from other Catholic schools. They also value opportunities to put their faith into action through engaging in the CAFOD leadership programme, culminating with them attending a CAFOD presentation in London. Chaplaincy provision is an ongoing focus for the college with plans to further extend activities and increase participation. The numbers participating in lunchtime chaplaincy activities are impressive and include fortnightly visits to local care homes. The work of the Faith Works team has been especially effective in enabling students to reflect on their own faith journey through visiting and leading faith activities in local partner primary schools. There is a palpable awareness on the part of all students that they are part of a Catholic college which has a responsibility to care for and respect others of any faith and none. This is clearly demonstrated in their empathic responses in RE when studying other faiths and their enthusiastic participation in Lenten and Advent fundraising activities and

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through House/Year events. Discussions with students highlighted the hugely positive impact of the school's well planned retreat programme which includes opportunities for them to evaluate and suggest areas for improvements.

Students' attainment and achievement in Religious Education is outstanding. Teachers are clearly committed to bringing about improvement across all outcomes for students as demonstrated by the high standards being achieved across all levels of ability, irrespective of ability. There is no significant underachievement from any group of students. RE compares favourably with other subjects, with an upward trend in terms of results at GCSE and consistently high outcomes in fast track AS in Year 11. This is due in no small measure to the positive impact of effective and engaging teaching strategies on learning and attainment. The RE curriculum motivates and engages students to use religious language in a meaningful way, developing a mature understanding of the implications of belief for everyday life.

Students are challenged by teachers to critically reflect and evaluate their own and others' ideas and beliefs. The involvement of outside speakers, and visits to places of worship, have been effective in providing students with an opportunity to meet, reflect on and understand beliefs of people from other faith traditions. Discussions with students demonstrate the positive impact of these visits and how they consider that they learn in an experiential way which is different to the classroom setting. Students' commitment to improving their knowledge and understanding of their learning is strong as evidenced in their responses to teacher comments in books and in discussions with inspectors. The ongoing focus on developing thinking and questioning skills across Key Stages 3-5 in both the RE and Philosophy programmes has been highly effective in contributing to this. Students' competence in developing as independent learners has been enhanced through use of a virtual learning environment, with the home learning project in Y9 being particularly well received. Overall, students are highly motivated, enjoy their learning in RE and philosophy and are appreciative of their teachers' commitment to supporting them and bringing about improvement. This includes promoting Catholic values, securing and celebrating achievement, developing high esteem and confidence in all students and providing learning opportunities which will prepare them for their future in a multi faith society.

There are numerous opportunities for students to participate in the prayer life of the school, including class, house and whole school Masses, whole school liturgies, assemblies, chaplaincy and retreats. Students speak highly and appreciatively of this provision. They demonstrate respect and reverence during collective prayer and have a secure knowledge of traditional prayers. The RE department and lay chaplain work closely with the school's chaplain to ensure that as many students as possible are involved in planning and leading worship. In particular, the school's house councils have been instrumental in encouraging large scale pupil participation in house Masses. This initiative has grown and developed over the past 5 years and both staff and students have responded in an overwhelmingly positive way to these, due to the increased sense of ownership and unity they have brought to the house system. The school's strong prayer life combined with a well-planned RE curriculum has been effective in developing students' understanding of the sacramental life of the church. There are consistently high numbers of students who are commissioned annually as extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion and who serve at the college weekly Mass and within their parishes. These young people are supported by a training programme, retreat day and ongoing prayer opportunities throughout the year. In addition, opportunities for students in years 9 to 12 to take part in the Leaders of Faith Award have enabled them to put their faith into action

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and become leaders both in school and in their parishes. The take up of students receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation is exceptionally high due to the school's system of invitations, with teacher support throughout the day. This is a model of good practice which provides students with a meaningful and spiritual experience of Reconciliation within a context of educating them about the meaning of the Sacrament. It has also given students the opportunity to meet with different priests and contribute to strengthening school-parish links. Opportunities for spiritual and moral development are promoted throughout schemes of work in all key stages. This is supported by the involvement of the Lay Chaplain in promoting spirituality through workshops and meditations in RE lessons. This is an inclusive school where all, irrespective of their faith backgrounds, feel included in prayer and worship. One student spoke openly about 'not going to a church but school is church for me and I really value it'.

## **How effective are leaders and governors in developing the Catholic Life of the school?**

### **Grade 1**

Governors and leaders are respected role models who are fully committed to the pursuit of excellence and who work together as a highly effective team to ensure that the promotion of the school's Catholic life is at the centre of its strategic direction. This is expressed in the college motto 'In novitate vitae' (towards new life) and, 'A Christian community learning and growing together'. Provision for staff induction and INSET, which further develops an understanding and commitment to the Church's mission in education, is strong. Links with the diocese are effective and all Bishop's Conference requirements fulfilled. Self-evaluation of the school's Catholic life is robust, challenging individuals to be objective and ambitious about what can be developed, as well as being clear and concise about achievements. The Principal has been instrumental in creating a culture of building on and improving the school's Catholic life at every level, with attention to detail being a particular strength. She provides clear, focused and inspirational leadership, with an unequivocal commitment to the pursuit of excellence in promoting the Catholic mission of the college and high academic standards overall. Annual surveys ensure that the views of students and parents inform future planning. Links with parents are especially strong. The school is highly regarded by parents, who consider it to be a beacon of excellence in all aspects. This is due in no small measure to the relentless focus on the pursuance of high standards by the Principal and her leadership team.

Governors maintain careful oversight of Religious Education. RE data on performance is analysed thoroughly and responded to where underperformance is identified, and support is put in place with clear targets for improvements. The faculty development and improvement plan effectively identifies any underperformance across the key stages, with strategies implemented to support students as appropriate. Faculty meetings have been instrumental in promoting awareness of outstanding teaching and sharing good practice. The head of faculty leads a well-qualified team who are highly regarded by students. With support from the leadership team, he monitors and evaluates the RE programme through lesson observations and reviews. This, combined with learning walks and pupil voice, has been highly effective in improving the curriculum and contributing to pupil outcomes. Areas for improvement are identified through accurate self-evaluation, including a clear faculty development and improvement plan which is formally reviewed at the midpoint of the year and adjusted as

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necessary to ensure that pupil progress continues to improve. Systems for tracking, monitoring and evaluating the impact of the work in RE are accurate in securing improvements.

## **How effective is the provision for Catholic Education?**

**Grade 1**

Overall, teaching is consistently good with outstanding features, promoting purposeful learning and high levels of attainment across the key stages. Lessons are well planned and resourced with a strong focus on challenging students through effective questioning techniques. This, combined with teachers' thorough specialist knowledge, elicits thoughtful responses from learners. Students enjoy RE and achieve well due to their teachers' ongoing commitment to improving their learning and the pastoral care they provide. Students are extremely well behaved and sustain high levels of concentration in class. Insistence on high expectations is a hallmark of the faculty. Teachers are reflective practitioners, committed to improving teaching practice across the faculty, with five members having completed an outstanding teachers' programme which has improved their practice and the progress of students. This has been effective in enabling them to reflect critically on their own practice and identify new teaching and learning strategies which they have incorporated into schemes of work and shared at faculty meetings. Assessment for learning is an integral part of the faculty's approach to improving teaching and learning. Marking of students' work is thorough and diagnostic, providing them with clear, detailed steps which enable them to understand how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Time is set aside in most lessons to make improvements and should be an ongoing focus for the department. Assessments are carefully planned and resourced in line with the NBRIA levels at KS3 and the Edexcel criteria at KS4 and KS5. As a result, outcomes for the majority of students are excellent, and well above average for a significant minority.

The Religious Education curriculum meets all Bishops' Conference requirements and is responsive to diocesan guidelines. It is carefully planned to link with the *Catholic Curriculum Directory*, ensuring full coverage of the Religious Education programme. The curriculum is inclusive and meets the needs of students of all ages irrespective of their backgrounds. Differentiated resource are produced for each scheme of work and adapted by teachers for each group, enabling students to build on prior knowledge and experience and make appropriate progress in relation to their ability. Preparation for the diocesan changes in relation to how the content of what is taught to Year 7 have been implemented from September 2014. Further changes are planned for Year 8 and 9 and are gradually being phased in during the 2015/2016 academic year. Opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and vocational development are promoted throughout schemes of work in all key stages. In addition, the RE faculty work closely with other subject areas and the lay chaplain, to effectively promote these areas. Together they make a significant contribution to enhancing students' understanding of other religions and cultures. The next step is to record and build on the work done in these areas by engaging in a cross curricular mapping exercise of opportunities provided for students' spiritual, moral, social and vocational development.

Prayer is integral to the life of the school, reflecting its Catholic character and is a key aspect of every school celebration. Many opportunities, highlighted previously, are provided for students to lead, organise and participate in worship and they are enthusiastically embraced. Prayer is inclusive, taking into account the variety of faith backgrounds among students. Chaplaincy provision has a positive impact on worship and liturgy and continues to develop and improve.

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The school's chaplain is highly effective in promoting parish and school links, working closely with key groups within the school. This could be developed further by setting up a whole school team consisting of pupil and staff representatives from across the key stages, faculties and leadership team.

## Summary of Parental Questionnaires

There was a very high return of 341 parental questionnaires. These were overwhelmingly positive in their views of the school, highlighting a strong sense of community, high standards, exceptional leadership, caring staff and a focus on strong moral Christian values. A number of parents requested more information being provided on RE and relationship education with a few seeking improvement in SEN provision. Some typical responses to the question 'Why did you choose this school' included:

'St Bede's has focused on the values that so many seek in a quality education - superior academic results, faith formation and the building of character, and safe, caring community where my child is accepted, respected and never lost in the crowd'

'Welcoming and loving environment'

'Good links with parish and church

'Helps produce young adults who care about those around them'

'Very nurturing and seems to put the welfare of the whole child first, rather than being all about academic achievement'

'A really, really good attitude and tremendous application from teachers and support staff alike'

'High level of staff retention'

'Safe and happy school where children can be themselves'

'Beacon of academic and pastoral excellence in the community'

'Headteacher dynamic and approachable whilst maintaining an authoritative air'

'That everyone is different but they can be what they want to be'

'Nothing else compares!'