



INSPECTION REPORT

St Bede's Catholic College
Long Cross, Lawrence Weston, Bristol, BS110SU
Telephone: 0117 3772200
e-mail address: Contact@stbedesc.org

URN: 137627

Principal: Mr R King
Chair of Governors: Mrs J Morris

**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**

Date of inspection: November 10th-11th 2021
Date of previous inspection: January 2015

Reporting Inspector: Mrs A Fowler
Additional Inspector: Mrs A Barrett

Description of school

St Bede's is an average sized mixed 11-18 Catholic Academy. It serves the Catholic community in parts of Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire. It currently takes in students from at least nineteen Catholic parishes. At present the college has 207 students in the sixth form. 5.27 % of students are recognised as having special educational needs and the proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is well above average at 25%. The proportion of baptised Catholic students is well above average for the diocese at 91.83%, rising to 95.18% in years 7-11. Since the last inspection the planned admission number for the school has increased due to the demand for places. The new principal has been in place since September having been a member of the senior leadership team prior to this. During the last eighteen months the college faced the challenges presented by Covid with much of the teaching taking place online when necessary. The college has established strategies to support the academic work of students and the pastoral wellbeing of both students and staff.

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school (summary statement)

Grade: Outstanding

This is an outstanding school because:

- students are extremely proud of their Catholic college and wholeheartedly embrace the many opportunities provided for all to grow in faith;
- all staff support the ethos of the school and actively seek to make connections between their specific subject areas and the ethos of the school;
- chaplaincy is at the heart of college life and provides varied opportunities for all students to explore their spirituality and make connections between faith and life;
- religious education is highly valued by pupils and the department achieves consistently high academic results;
- leaders at all levels support and model the ethos of the school and are committed to ensuring that this is embedded in school life.

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop

- Issues since the last inspection have been addressed.
- Leaders and governors are committed to supporting and developing the Catholic life of the college including chaplaincy.
- Parents value the college and as a consequence the number of students in the college continues to grow.
- The religious education department is well led and well qualified, highly valued by students and focused on developing the potential of all students.

What the school should do to improve further

- Governors need to ensure that the monitoring and evaluation processes, which already take place, are systematically recorded and the impact of these activities made clear.
- Explore ways of formally involving students in monitoring and evaluating the Catholic Life of the school.
- Further develop the skills of all staff in leading prayer and reflection.

Catholic Life

Grade: Outstanding

a) The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school

Students and staff are proud of their college, appreciate and value the Catholic ethos and can articulate the connections between faith and life. They regard the college as a family community. This is reflected in the high retention rates of students into the sixth form who speak eloquently of the support and care provided by staff for both their academic and pastoral development. Students embrace the opportunities provided by the college to take on leadership roles through, for example, mentoring younger students, representing the college to parents and feeder primary schools, organising charity events, and exploring eco work. They understand Catholic Social Teaching and the need to put this into practice. They respond well to the opportunities provided by chaplaincy to live out their faith through, for example, the CAFOD Young Leadership Programme, the Young Volunteers, and the SVP. They enthusiastically take part in retreats. Reflecting on a recent retreat, one Year 7 student commented, "I connected with God, and it made me think about my faith". Another saying, "It let me think about how I can be a better person". Students in years 11 and in the sixth form volunteer to become Eucharistic Ministers and spoke of the opportunity this gave them to share their faith with others. One student commenting, *"confirmation answered many questions for me about faith and I think being a Eucharistic minister will help me grow in faith and give something back"* Throughout the college behaviour is exemplary and students appreciate the opportunities offered to learn about other faiths and cultures.

The personal, social and health education programme is well designed and holistic in nature. The religious education department takes the lead on relationships and sex education. This enables an integrated approach, making clear links between church teaching and current issues and enabling students to formulate their own views from a knowledgeable background.

b) The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the college

The mission of the college is clearly expressed on the website, in its documentation and in its recruitment procedures. 'The St Bede's Way' is well understood and articulated by students and staff. Staff actively seek ways to make explicit the Catholic ethos across the curriculum, exploring ways to implement opportunities for spiritual and moral development in their schemes of work. Pastoral staff participate in and value chaplaincy activities like the retreat programme and the liturgical activities which take place within the college. The chapel is a reflective space at the heart of the college and is well used by staff and students. There is one full INSET day per year focusing on Catholic ethos, with other more informal training provided throughout the year through staff briefings or further INSET days. New staff are introduced to the Catholic ethos of the college on

interview and a structured induction programme offers an explanation of what Catholic ethos means in practice, and their role in developing it. Staff and students are

supportive of each other, and well-developed pastoral programmes aim to support the wellbeing of all. This was particularly evident in the way the college supported students and staff through the challenge of Covid and the subsequent return to a more normal school life. Year 13 expressed their anxieties about their future and their academic work but expressed their confidence and appreciation for the work of staff in supporting them. Chaplaincy is valued by governors and the leadership of the school.

c) How well leaders and governors promote, monitor, and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school

The college's leaders are committed to the Church's mission in education and the development of its Catholic Life which is viewed by leaders and governors as a core responsibility. The Catholic life of the school is monitored and evaluated although this aspect needs to be formalised and the impact of decisions recorded. Catholic life is always the first item of the principal's report to the governing body and the development plan highlights opportunities for improvement in the Catholic life of the college. Curriculum and Professional Development (CPD) on Catholic life takes place on a regular basis and contributes to the excellent understanding of staff on what this means in their respective curriculum areas. Communication with parents is good with pastoral staff aiming to respond to any parental concern within twenty-four hours. This strong link between parents and staff continued during Covid, with staff engaging online with parents. The college actively engages with the Newman Partnership through, for example, chaplaincy events, sports events, moderation for religious education and meetings between school leadership teams. The college supports all diocesan events.

a) How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education

Pupils in all key stages make excellent progress. Pupil attainment at GCSE has been consistently strong over the past three years and is well above the national average with Religious Education being one of the top performing subjects in the college. Results at A Level are also strong with 100% of students obtaining A* to C grades in 2021. There is no significant under achievement by any group of students. Students are articulate and knowledgeable about faith, using religious language confidently and with understanding. Behaviour in lessons is excellent and students enjoy their lessons and feel their views are listened to. They respond well to challenge and appreciate that staff are knowledgeable about the subject. They enjoy debate and the opportunity to learn about other faiths. They expressed the view that religious education was an important subject "helping you understand the issues in the world and the nature of England as a multi-cultural, multi faith society." They considered that the lessons in school would help them respect and understand others. One student spoke about how the lessons had helped her appreciate and understand her friend who was a member of the Sikh faith.

b) The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education

Teachers' expertise and mastery of the subject clearly leads to engagement in the lessons, well planned activities, and the progress of students. Teachers make excellent use of question-and-answer techniques to revise prior knowledge and develop understanding. Lessons encourage students to work both collaboratively and independently with opportunities for individual research and paired or group activities. Students are motivated to succeed. All lessons are well planned, making good use of ICT and a variety of strategies. In most of the lessons observed the pace drove the lesson along, occasionally too long was spent on one activity. Work is differentiated with different strategies used to help students improve. Staff have an extremely positive relationship with students which helps motivate and promote high expectations which the students seek to live up to. Data is used to further help staff plan their lessons with the needs of students in mind. Formal summative assessments take place three times a year and staff provide feedback through diagnostic marking setting targets for students to improve their work. Students are generally aware of the progress they are making and use the feedback and the targets set to help them improve.

c) How well leaders and governors monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education

Leaders and governors ensure that religious education receives the required time allocation in all key stages and is funded on a par with other major subjects. It is regarded as a key subject within the college.

The head of department is committed to ensuring this is a vital, exciting, well performing subject contributing to the formation of articulate young people who are able to explore their own views with increasing confidence. He has a clear vision for the subject and is well supported by a skilled and enthusiastic team. Schemes of work are well planned and compliant with diocesan requirements and reviewed regularly. Recently, some changes have been made in order to help students who have experienced disruption to their learning during Covid. Schemes of work for general religious education in the sixth form have recently been reviewed and this has led to greater engagement. Approximately 10% of the sixth form study A Level Religious Studies which demonstrates the value students place on it. Lesson observations, book trawls and student surveys help inform practice and lead to improvement. The faculty meets together regularly to share ideas and report on teaching strategies. There is a link governor for the subject who meets with the department.

The Prayer Life of the School

Grade: Outstanding

a) How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's prayer life

Prayer is central to the life of the school and there are myriad opportunities for pupils and staff. Either voluntary Mass or a Liturgy of the Word takes place on a weekly basis, and this is extremely well supported by students. Students help organise and prepare the liturgy and older students act as Eucharistic Ministers. This helps develop students understanding of the liturgical year and explore the connections with their lives. Students speak highly and appreciatively of this provision. A variety of different prayer styles are in use including meditation and traditional Catholic practices. Students demonstrate respect and reverence during prayer. The lay chaplain seeks to create opportunities for student involvement and his inspiring leadership encourages students to value this provision. Form tutors are provided with materials to help engage students in daily prayer. Liturgy and prayer are designed to be inclusive and help make explicit for students the links between faith and life. The chapel is a calm reflective space at the heart of the school and well used by students. At present, in part to compensate for the difficulties students faced in accessing their parish during Covid, there is a Confirmation group in the school for older students which has attracted nearly thirty participants. Those students attending commented on the fact that this gave them an opportunity to further explore their faith.

b) The quality of the prayer life provided by the school

Praying together is part of the daily experience for all pupils and staff. Themes are linked to the liturgical year and enables them to reflect on any current issues within the community or the wider world. The opportunities and the resources provided are welcomed by students and staff and it is clear that prayer is a priority for the school. Further training to enhance all of staff's abilities to lead prayer and reflection would further enhance the provision. Displays around the college point towards the liturgical season. Throughout the last eighteen months liturgies have been provided online for staff, students and parents with opportunities for students to be involved. Retreats are planned for students and the take-up for these opportunities testifies to the value in which they are held. Recently, retreats have been held in school, in Kintbury, in Viney Hill and in Rome. These have contributed to students understanding of the universality of the church and the connections between faith and life. All staff support these activities. Students are encouraged to reflect on the activities and suggest further improvements. Students support for charity work, and its high profile within the school, further contribute to their understanding of how prayer and action are linked.

c) How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the prayer life of the school.

The lay chaplain and the religious education staff are extremely knowledgeable, enthusiastic, and committed to developing the prayer life of the college and seek to ensure this is presented to the pupils in an accessible and relevant way. The lay chaplain is highly visible to students and a model of excellent practice. Students believe that leaders and governors value prayer.

The governing body is kept informed about the prayer life of the school through the principal's report, the link governor and observation. Heads of House monitor and evaluate the prayer life within their Houses and in turn share their conclusions with the senior leadership team. Parents and students have an opportunity to share their views through questionnaires which then impacts on the planning. In a more informal setting students feel they can approach the lay chaplain and the staff to share their views.

Summary of Parental Questionnaires

There were 151 responses from parents which were almost entirely positive. Parents commented on the support the school provides with the majority of parents selecting the school because of its ethos. One parent commented, *"we wanted a school where their faith would be celebrated and where academic achievement and pastoral care go hand in hand."* The pastoral support given by the school was mentioned by many parents for example *"The pastoral care is fantastic and there is a strong partnership with parents/carers,"* Another parent commented on the relationship between staff and pupils, *"Every time we visit there is a large number of children who give up their time to be ambassadors for the school and who are happy to be there. We see the teachers and children treating each other respectfully every time we visit the school. We feel the school prepares the children well to find their place in the world and to be a thoughtful citizen."*